

The Green Thumb

February 2004

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February meeting – Malcolm Beck

February's meeting will be held Thursday, February 26 at the Bob Duncan Community Center. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m.



Malcolm Beck, the founder of Garden-Ville, will be our guest speaker this month. Malcolm is the author of two books, "The Garden-Ville Method – Lessons in Nature" and "The Secret Life of Compost". He is co-author of "Texas Organic Vegetable Gardening" and "The Texas Bug Book" with Howard Garrett. He also writes a monthly column for Home and Garden magazine.

Garden-Ville first started out on the family farm back in 1957. After a move and many television appearances and newspaper articles about what Malcolm and his wife were doing with organics, many people wanted to learn more about organic produce, compost, and the whole organic concept in general. In 1980 Garden-Ville Fertilizer Company was incorporated, and in 1988 the company again proved that there was a demand for organic products over chemicals.

At this month's meeting Malcolm will be sharing his views on gardening organic fruit trees, grapevines, berries, and much more.

The Organic Gardener's Pledge

1. Protect and preserve the land and the waters
2. Leave no ground bare: cover it with mulch and/or ground-covering plants
3. Build up your soil
4. Do not disturb the soil unnecessarily; try to preserve its layers intact and right side up
5. Compost
6. Avoid the use of synthetic chemicals
7. Utilize plant materials that are appropriate to your climate
8. Avoid planting aggressive, invasive plants
9. Preserve valuable plant specimens
10. Please yourself – do not garden with your neighbor's reaction in mind

From *Eat More Dirt* by Ellen Sandbeck

Contributed by *Esther Chambliss*

The Business of Being Green

Each year, consumers purchase over 54 million pounds of herbicides, 14 million pounds of insecticides, and 10 million pounds of fungicides for home and garden use. Over 4 billion pounds of fertilizer are used for non-farm applications (residential, recreational, and public property), and only a small percentage is organic. But if you have roamed around any of the big box home improvement stores lately, you might have noticed something relatively new: organic gardening products.

A part of me is absolutely thrilled. Anything that can put a significant dent in those numbers is a good thing, isn't it?

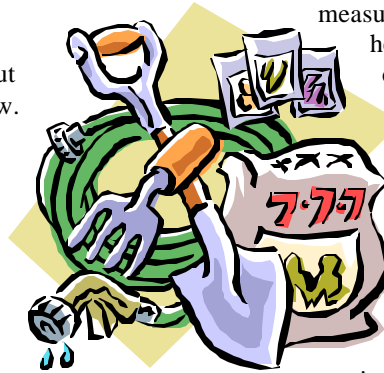
But there's another part of me that looks upon this with trepidation. After all, the larger the distribution and the greater the consumer interest, the more likely the large chemical corporations will jump on the bandwagon. And I can not put out of my mind the first lesson I learned in finance class: *the goal of the corporation is to increase shareholder wealth*. Many of these companies are entities that have proven over and over again that a dollar is worth far more than your health or mine.

The Bad News . . .

In 1999 the EPA published a study about contaminants in fertilizers, mostly heavy metals (cadmium, lead, arsenic, chromium, mercury, nickel, vanadium, copper, and zinc). Although most states regulate fertilizer production, these

regulations focus only on whether or not the statements on the bag are true – do they contain the levels of N, P, and K that they claim. Wording about contaminants and inclusion of products that are harmful to plants, animals, humans, or the environment is only of a general nature. Canada and several other countries regulate the amounts of heavy metals that can be present in fertilizers but the US has no such law. Only two states (Washington and Texas) have regulations that establish limits on heavy metal contaminants.

Industrial waste recycling is encouraged in the US, and some of these wastes are used in one form or another in fertilizers. The amounts vary greatly and are generally unknown, since there is no requirement to list what is in a bag of fertilizer besides the “active” ingredients. Hazardous wastes that can be recycled into fertilizer products include wood ash, emission control dust/sludge from the production of steel in electrical furnaces (known as K061), brass foundry dusts, and ashes from burned tires. Other wastes that can be used include cement kiln dust (as a liming agent), mine tailings, gypsum from coal-burning electric power plants, ash from wood-burning power plants, and pulp and paper sludges. A certain iron product that is available in most home & garden stores is shown in the EPA report to contain levels of



study, 38 exceeded the Canadian standards for one or more heavy metals, including arsenic, cadmium, lead, mercury, nickel, and zinc. Although studies have shown that “organic” or “natural” fertilizers are generally cleaner than the synthetic ones, it should be noted here that even some organic fertilizers contain

measurable amounts of the heavy metals. The EPA document states that “organic fertilizer” is defined by the industry as *a material that contains carbon and one or more elements besides hydrogen and oxygen that are required for plant growth* – it

doesn't say where the carbon source or other elements should come from. Indeed, industry ashes and mining wastes are currently sold as “organic” fertilizers.

Elevated levels of heavy metals can even come from fish parts (because the fish themselves are fished from contaminated areas) and rock phosphate from Idaho, which is not a “waste” but can contain elevated levels of arsenic, lead, and cadmium. I am certain that none of this comes to mind when any of us think about organics, yet they are a cheap way to fill a 40 pound bag. And the higher the pressure to maximize profit and increase the stock price, the more likely you are to find these products in your “organic” fertilizer.

The Good News . . .

We are fortunate to have many organic vendors in North Texas. The reason we have so many choices is not because someone was out for a quick buck, but because real human beings worked day and night to make a difference. Instead of putting stock prices above everything, most of these people figured out a way to make a living doing something they felt was good for the environment and good for their (cont. next page)

arsenic, lead, and cadmium that are *hundreds of times greater* than a “normal” background level for soil.

Of the 1389 combinations of fertilizer products evaluated in the





Winter honeysuckle is in bloom right now. Although it's probably not appropriate for a formal garden (it can be rather shaggy-looking), catching a whiff of its delightful scent in the dead of winter makes it a joy to have in your yard!

Business of Being Green (cont.)

community. I know many of these vendors by sight and by name – we all have the opportunity to stop by and talk to them at our “Natural Urban Living Garden Show” in June, and at the “House and Organic Gardening Show” every January; we also get to talk to them at speaking engagements at our local clubs and at other Metroplex venues.

Unlike the big corporations, many of our local vendors are more than happy to tell you what's in the bag or bottle you are purchasing, and why they put it there (if they don't, go elsewhere!) – some even include an ingredients list on their package. There's no PR department, no layers of bureaucracy, no “someone will get

back to you.” When you stop by and talk to someone at these garden shows, he or she is usually the one who makes the decisions – either deciding what will go into the bag, or which product brands will be carried in the store.

So I am happy that organic gardening products are beginning to see a wider distribution, and I am hopeful that the tons of fertilizer that are used in our gardens yearly will start to shift toward materials that are not harmful to the environment. But I will continue to support our smaller, local vendors who worked so hard to make this happen. My money is on them!

-- Angie Brown

Sources:

Background Report on Fertilizer Use, Contaminants, and Regulations, <http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/fertilizer.pdf>

PCC Natural Markets: Sound Consumer: The Scoop on Organic Fertilizer, <http://www.pccnaturalmarkets.com/sc/0303/sc0303-fertilizer.html>

Ladies of the Garden Design Class – Spring 2004

The Ladies of the Garden will be hosting their Spring 2004 design class beginning February 23 (for 8 Mondays) or February 24 (for 8 Tuesdays). This class teaches design, maintenance, the organic process, and a wide knowledge of plant material and how to use it.

The class schedule will be as follows:

Week 1 – Intro to design; slides on trees, shrubs, ground covers, and vines.

Week 2 – Micro climates; companion planting; slides on perennials, annuals and herbs.

Week 3 – All about roses; drainage, watering systems and gutters.

Week 4 – Organic procedures, composting and planting techniques; adding structure to your design.

Week 5 – Garden tour; container gardening; theme gardens; garden rooms.

Week 6 – Pest and disease ID and control.

Week 7 – Putting your knowledge to work; slides on seasonal bloom, companion planting, review on structure.

Week 8 – Garden tour; review; slides on the best of everything studied.

Cost for the 8 week class is \$275 per household (may bring spouse or other family member), and includes a 175 page notebook, graph paper, snacks, and lots of knowledge! The classes will be held at Lucy Harrell's home in Southwest Arlington. If you don't think you'll be able to make all 8 classes, make arrangements with Lucy for a make-up class.

To sign up, call Lucy at 817-572-0148 or email lucygeorge5208@sbcglobal.net. Visit the Ladies of the Garden online at www.organicgardeningtx.com

Join . . .
the Dirt Doctor's Ground Crew and receive 12 issues of the Dirt Doctor's Dirt as well as a membership card that can be used for discounts at organic suppliers.

Sign up on www.dirtdoctor.com
or call 866.444.DIRT.

2004 Speaker Schedule

February 26: Malcolm Beck (Founder of Gardenville) – Fruits & Berries

March 25: Amanda VanHoozier, Coppell Community Garden

April 29: Patsy Rosen (Ft. Worth Iris Society) – Irises

May 27: Bob Dunfield (Cowtown Gourd Patch) – Gourds

Saturday, June 19: Natural Urban Living Garden Show, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Bob Duncan Community Center Plant Sale, Vendors, Speakers, Kids' Room, Raffle, More!

July 29, August 26, September 30 Speakers TBD

October 28: Potluck & Business Meeting; Special Guest Jay Mertz (Rabbit Hill Farm)

Used Water???????

Acid-loving plants such as blueberries, azaleas, rhododendrons, heathers and citrus all enjoy a little drink of cold coffee or tea now and then.



Water used to rinse out milk bottles or cartons can be used to water outdoor plants. Tomatoes, eggplants, petunias, peppers, and potatoes all benefit from milky water because milk kills tobacco mosaic virus, which can afflict these related plants. Milky water also helps protect cabbages from cabbage worms.

Next time you cook vegetables think twice before you throw that water down the drain. Your plants will benefit from the vitamins and minerals in the water (cool the water first so you don't cook your plants). Or, use that water for soups and benefit from the vitamins and minerals yourself! Note: broccoli water becomes smelly as it ages.

Club Notes

Thanks to all our club members who manned the booth at the House & Organic Gardening Show on January 30-February 1. We got to meet a lot of wonderful people, and visited with many vendors as well!

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, then you were probably one of the folks who stopped by our booth and told us you'd like to receive one.



We invite you to visit us at any of our meetings (see list above left).

All meetings are held at the Bob Duncan Community Center at 2800 S. Center St in Arlington (Vandergriff Park), and are free to the public, as is our June Garden Show.

On another note, Angie Brown gave a program on organic gardening products to the St.

Maria's Garden Club in Arlington on Feb. 18. It was a real pleasure talking with this wonderful group of ladies!

*perennials
herbs
old fashioned annuals
old garden roses
native shrubs and trees
organics
gardenware
design
installation*

arlington	817. 451. 2149
colleyville	817. 488. 3525
dallas	214. 823. 9421
cedar hill	972. 291. 7650

r redenta's
garden shops
www.redentias.com

Supporting Organics

Organic foods are now a \$13 billion dollars per year industry and continuing to grow. The organic market segment is the fastest growing segment of the world economy. At this time it is important to remember how organics started and to support that philosophy; locally, organically and sustainably grown. This empowers the local community and most importantly the money stays in the local economy providing jobs and tax revenues. It improves the quality of the local environment, the freshness of the product, and lowers distribution costs. There is an additional benefit of knowing the person/people who are providing your food. This 'knowing your grower' will allow support of those who are practicing organic and sustainable principles who have decided not to participate in the certification program. (With the constant challenges nationally to change the certification requirements -such as the add on to the Omnibus bill to allow non-organic feed for organic beef to accomodate a Georgia constituent which was repealed due to public outrage- it is best to know your grower.)

There are a variety of options; to purchase products from local growers, the farmers market, the local organic cooperative, local markets, and some growers even have local delivery service. The Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners website has more information on growers at www.texasorganicgrowers.org. The organic vegetable coop for DFW is through the Dallas Fort Worth Vegetarian Society. The Dallas Farmers Market has an organic grower. One local rancher that has home delivery in DFW is Burgundy Beef. Ask questions, find out their philosophies and support those who are working to continue the organic and sustainable philisophy.

– Susan Horn

Creature Feature: Skunks!

One of the top searches that leads visitors to our website is consistently "skunks." This is a reprint of a story I wrote for the website in August of 2000.

Just when I thought I'd photographed about everything I could in the back yard (except for the camera-shy raccoons), I have new tenants under the back deck. For now I've named them Pepe and Peter. They're just babies right now, and we've been seeing them during the day as early as 9 a.m. and as late as 7 p.m. Needless to say, we keep our eyes wide open when we're outside now.

Although Doug (my husband) and I were somewhat upset when we first noticed the skunks (he walked between them on the sidewalk to the front door, and I just about ran into one on the doorstep after getting the mail), we've done some homework and have learned a lot:

* Skunks can carry rabies, but so can raccoons, opossums, bats, dogs, cats, etc. No, they're not born with it. Skunks get rabies by contact with a rabid animal, just like everyone else. As with any wild animal, enjoy them from a distance!

* If you have a skunk in your yard and call City of Arlington, the recourse is to set a live trap for it. When it is caught, they will kill it on the spot. It might, however, sit there in the trap all day while you wait for someone to come - this happened in my co-worker's yard last summer, during the 100+ degree heat.

* Skunks are born with the ability to spray. However, until they are several months old they can neither aim very well nor spray very far. When a skunk is about to spray, you

will have some warning. First, she will turn around and face her back end at the threat, and stomp her feet. If you haven't got the message by then, then Heaven help you!

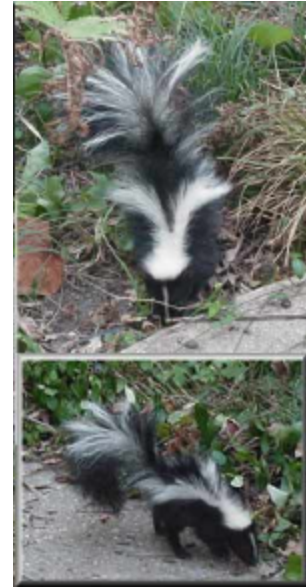
* Skunks can only see a few feet in front of their faces - probably the reason we see so many as roadkill. Try not to be too sneaky if you suspect they're around but you can see that they're not near. They're probably more afraid of you than you are of them! If you should suddenly find yourself up close to one, though, then it's time to be very quiet and move slowly. You don't want to appear threatening.

* Adult skunks are wanderers and normally don't stay in one place for more than a few days.

* In addition to eating seeds, berries, etc. skunks eat mice, rats, moles, snails, snakes, grubs, cockroaches and a host of other insects. Seems to me that they earn their keep!

* For over 70 years, people have actually bred and raised skunks (descended, of course) to keep as pets. They come in many different colors, not just the black and white of the wild ones. In captivity, skunks can live to be more than 20 years old. In the wild, however, two to three years is about it.

If you find that you have a skunk living in a place he shouldn't be, work on making the skunk's hiding place less desirable: trap and kill is NOT your only option, nor is it recommended at all unless it has bitten someone! My favorite tip (and one that can be used with any unwanted critter) is to sprinkle flour near the opening of their den -- they'll leave footprints so you can



tell if they're in or out before blocking up the hole.

For the last five years, my husband and I have maintained our yard naturally. We've provided plants with edible fruits and seeds, water, and a brush pile for shelter. Those of us who have created backyard wildlife habitats really have no right to expect that we'll get to pick and choose the creatures that enjoy it.

So what am I going to do about my skunks? Watch, learn, take pictures, try not to startle one, appreciate that they eat mice and rats, and wait for these beautiful creatures to move on.

Update: we found out that skunks LOVE peanuts, and were browsing around the peanut feeders that were close to the house. We moved one of the peanut feeders back towards the edge of the yard, and within a week they had moved on.

Most of this information came from the website of S.K.U.N.K.Scentral (www.stinkybusiness.org) - I have been unable to connect to that site though, and have been able to find it elsewhere.

-- Angie Brown

Pilot Recycling Program for North Arlington Apartments

Arlington is conducting a pilot recycling program at the Northeast branch of the Arlington Library for apartment residents of north Arlington. The purpose of the pilot project is to gauge participation by tracking the volume of recycling dropped off. If successful, the City will examine the possibility of expanding the program to all public libraries in Arlington. Recycling bins have been placed in the parking lot at the northeast branch library located at 1905 E. Brown Blvd. Acceptable items include: Plastic jugs and bottles; glass jars and bottles; tin, steel and aluminum cans; and paper items such as newspaper, magazines, phone books, junk mail, office paper and flattened boxes.

Steps for Designing a Landscape . . .

1. Define how you want your landscape to look and feel. Think of a place, a yard, or a garden where you have been that you really loved. If you can't visualize a specific place then look through gardening books or magazines and when you come to pictures that appeal to you mark them so you can refer back to them [making yourself a collection of magazine pages to refer to when you are doing your design will be a great inspiration to you]. You may also want to take pictures of actual yards that appeal to you for reference later. You should also take pictures of your yard as it is now so you can have before and after pictures.
2. Decide what you and your family want from your yard. Keep a list of things that you want to be sure to do and add to it every time you think of something. Do you need/want a lot of play space (big lawn area) for sports or animals . . . a place to have a swing set or playhouse . . . a patio area . . . a potting shed, utility building or gazebo . . . a vegetable garden . . . a water feature? Do you want all planted beds with paths winding through the yard and no mowing . . . a place to hide your compost area or a place to show it off . . . a secret place for reading and thinking? Do you have utility boxes or AC units or swimming pool equipment to hide?
3. Know which direction the various sides of your house face. Make a note as to how far away these sides are from any structures such as fences, other houses, and large trees.
4. Do a sun track of your yard or area. Keep a chart of

where the sun hits the areas that you are going to be planting in. Any time that you get a chance notice where the sun hits (or doesn't hit) write it down. Try to be as thorough as possible. It is important to know how much sun an area gets during the day and when it gets sun – be sure to note times. Try to look at an area over a few

weeks, or long enough to know what's going on every 2 hours of daylight. If you are doing your sun track in the late winter or early spring you'll need to think about where the sun will be in the middle of summer, which will cause it to hit the garden differently. In the summer the sun is more north or more directly overhead and in the winter and early spring the sun rides low in the south.

5. Determine your soil type – do you have sand or clay?

6. Check for drainage problems (areas that tend to sit in water) and determine what causes the problem – do you need gutters, French drain, raised beds? Be sure to address these problems before you spend time and money on plant material.

7. Learn what plant materials (trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers, vines, roses, etc.) will create the look you want and do well in the areas where they will be planted. Learn what maintenance is required of the plant materials that you choose.

8. Draw out your design. If you are installing it yourself you may draw it out any way you can understand it. If you want to have someone else put it in – it will need to be scale and have all the plant material listed correctly with their spacing and amounts for the area. Make several copies of your drawing to enable you to play with it until you get it the way you want it. Start with structures and add trees and shrubs. Now you have your framework. Add roses, perennials, herbs, groundcovers and vines. Remember to space plant material at correct centers to avoid crowding and more maintenance.



Reasons for landscaping:

To meet the needs of you and your family;

To bring you pleasure;

To increase the value of your property.

OAK RAIN BARRELS



These wonderful Oak Rain Barrels add old world charm to your garden and catch 50 gallons of rain water. Our Rain Barrels come with a faucet that a 2 gallon watering can or bucket will slide under and a hose attachment that a soaker hose can be attached to. The top of each barrel has been drilled and fitted with a 10" catch that is lined with screen for mosquito control.

Your plants will love the nitrogen filled rain water that you collect. Food crops especially benefit from rain water.

Our rain barrels are \$140.00

Delivery is free in the following areas:
(Arlington, Ft. Worth, Grand Prairie and others)

Check with Lucy

To order contact Lucy at 817-572-0148

or e-mail: lucygeorge5208@sbcglobal.net

Barrels may also be purchased at GREEN MAMA'S
817-514-7336

-- Lucy Harrell



The Ladybug's Calendar (March 2004)

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
22-Feb	23-Feb	24-Feb	25-Feb	26-Feb	27-Feb	28-Feb
Ladies of the Garden Monday Design Class Begins phone 817-572-0148 or email lucygeorge5208@sbcglobal.net to enroll for Monday or Tuesday class (\$275 for 8 week class)	Ladies of the Garden Tuesday Design Class Begins	OGCFW: Esther Proctor (R&E Plants) "Plant Propagation"	DOS: Malcolm Beck "Insects: the Good, the Bad, & the Ugly"	 Malcolm Beck, Founder of Garden-Ville, "Fruits & Berries" DOGC: Brice Creelman (Shades of Green) "Native Plants and Trees for DFW" 6:30pm		
29-Feb	1-Mar	2-Mar	3-Mar	4-Mar	5-Mar	6-Mar
Ladies of the Garden Monday Class (continued)	Ladies of the Garden Tuesday Class (continued)			BRIT "The Last Great Habitat - Biodiversity of South Texas" Speaker: Fred Bryant, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Texas A&M-Kingsville 7pm		
7-Mar	8-Mar	9-Mar	10-Mar	11-Mar	12-Mar	13-Mar
Ladies of the Garden Monday Class (continued)	Ladies of the Garden Tuesday Class (continued)					
14-Mar	15-Mar	16-Mar	17-Mar	18-Mar	19-Mar	20-Mar
Ladies of the Garden Monday Class (continued)	Ladies of the Garden Tuesday Class (continued)	DOS: Darrin Bendill & Ronny Felderhoff (Muenster Milling) "Pet Nutrition" 7pm				TDG: Stroller Strut 10am
21-Mar	22-Mar	23-Mar	24-Mar	25-Mar	26-Mar	27-Mar
Ladies of the Garden Monday Class (continued)	OGCFW: Edith Pruitt (Master Gardener & Master Composter) "Growing House Plants Organically" 7pm Ladies of the Garden Tuesday Class (continued)			 Amanda VanHoozier from Coppell Community Garden 7pm DOGC: Speaker TBA 6:30pm		DOS field trip: Mineral Wells area, Bat World & Boudreau Herb Farm 9-4 FWBG: Ft. Worth Orchid Society Sale
28-Mar	29-Mar	30-Mar	31-Mar	1-Apr	2-Apr	3-Apr
Ladies of the Garden Monday Class (continued)	Ladies of the Garden Tuesday Class (continued)					DOGC Plant Sale

AOGC: Arlington Organic Garden Club meets at 7 PM at the Bob Duncan Community Center, 2800 S. Center St., Arlington, TX. <http://www.aogc.org>
BRIT: Botanical Research Institute of Texas meets at 7 PM in the Ft Worth Botanic Gardens, 3220 Botanic Garden Blvd, Ft. Worth, TX. <http://www.brit.org>
DOGC: Dallas Organic Garden Club meets at 6:30 PM (lecture starts at 7) in the King of Glory Lutheran Church, 6411 LBJ Hwy, Dallas, TX. <http://www.dogc.org>
DOS: Denton Organic Society meets at 7 PM on the third Wednesday of the month at the UNT Environmental Sciences Building, West Hickory and Avenue D, Denton, TX.
FWBG: Ft. Worth Botanic Garden is located at 3220 Botanic Garden Boulevard, Fort Worth, TX.
OGCFW: Organic Garden Club of Ft. Worth meets at 7 PM at the Ft. Worth Botanic Gardens, 3220 Botanic Garden Blvd, Ft. Worth, TX. <http://www.organicgardenclubfw.org>

address correction requested



Next meeting. . .

Thursday, February 26, 2004

7:00 pm social, meeting starts at 7:30 sharp

Malcolm Beck – “Fruits & Berries”

Refreshments: Cheryn & Dave Barnett, Pete & Bernetta Glasser, Nancy Hagwood

**Members:
Per last month's
vote, our
membership year
now begins in
January. 2004
dues are now due.**

Club Information

Membership dues: \$20/year (individual or family) – membership year begins in January.

Join/renew at any meeting, or send check to return address above.

Meetings are last Thursday of the month (January – October, except June garden show on third Saturday)

- Doors open at 7 pm for refreshments, meeting begins at 7:30 pm
- Open to the public unless meeting is designated “members only”
- Awesome raffle prizes are donated by Redenta’s Garden and by Rabbit Hill Farm!
- Meeting Location: The Garden Room, Bob Duncan Community Center, 2800 South Center Street (Vandergriff Park)

If you would like to serve on the AOGC board, please contact any of the current board members, or send email to board@aogc.org

Newsletter deadline: Third Thursday of each month

Please send newsletter submissions to Angie Brown, angie@aogc.org (include “Newsletter Submission” in the subject line, please), (817) 795-3300.

Want the newsletter but live too far away to go to meetings? Subscribe to the newsletter for \$10/year (to cover printing and postage). Send a note to us (see return address) along with payment and the newsletters will keep coming.

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.

- John Muir, Naturalist -