

Native Plant Society of Texas
Big Bend Chapter
April 2007 Newsletter

Wildscaping - Gardening for Wildlife April 14 -

There is still room in this workshop for another 20 people - and Good News! - to encourage enrollment, we are offering the class at the same low price as the early registrants - \$20 for individuals and \$30 for couples who are members and \$25 for individuals and \$40 for couples who are not members! Now is the time to get your friends and neighbors on board!

We hope the price difference will encourage people to join, and we hope the fact that it's a fund raiser will get members to support our wonderful native plant society chapter. Four great speakers and the beautiful new/old Indian Lodge in the Davis Mountains State Park and inspiring ways to make your garden better than ever.

If you've wanted more birds and butterflies in your garden, this is the workshop for you - and just in time for the CDRI Plant Sale at the end of April, you'll have new information to help you pick out just the right plants.

Registration is by mail - send your name, address and contact information and your check for the appropriate amount to Martha Latta, Treasurer, Big Bend NPSOT, Los Ranchos Box 15, Alpine, 79830. Log on to <http://www.npsot.org/BigBend/WildscapesWorkshop.htm> for more information and the names and number of the players!

Birding Classes -

After the Wildscapes Workshop, your garden will be full of birds. You can learn more about them in the birding class that NPSOT member and Super Birder Carol Edwards is offering through CDRI. Carol will teach two classes and lead two field trips in April and May. The class is strictly limited to 15 registered participants and the registration fee for all four sessions is \$25.

Call Jan Hill at CDRI 432.364.2499 for information and to register.

More NPSOT Talent -

Landscape architect Polly Melton is offering her skills to clients interested in getting the most out of their new house by site-ing it on the land to best advantage.

Lots of things go into getting the house "just right" with regard to view, breeze, summer sun and winter winds, rainwater harvesting, road access, soils, drainage - it's a long list that needs an expert's help.

Call Polly at 432.364.2577 to find out more.

Vegetable Gardening -

Time Magazine's recent cover story "Forget Organic, Eat Local" speaks to us in the Big Bend because we are at the mercy of "trucked in " produce rather than "truck farmed" produce.

But you can fix that limp lettuce and fertilizer-packed wan tomato by growing your own. Here from Marfa neighbor Sandra Harper - the muse behind the Marfa Farm Stand - are some simple instructions for that vegetable garden you've wanted:

HOW TO PLANT A GARDEN --Enjoy your garden and growing your own food

Our wet winter has readied the soil for planting. Mark out a bed 3ft wide by however long you want to make it. Using a digging fork, turn over the soil at a depth of about 6 inches, working backwards down the bed so you don't step on turned soil. Next, using a hard rake, breakup the clods by raking back and forth across the width of the bed, putting the clumps

of grass into the compost. Add two inches of composted material to the raked bed and continue raking back and forth until the material is mixed in with the top few inches. Add more if you think your soil is suffering from serious compaction and lack of topsoil.

Using a board, tap down the entire surface of the wide bed to help the seeds make contact with the soil when you plant them. Water lightly. Make a furrow. Following the instructions on the seed packet, sow the seed in the furrow and pat it down. Make the subsequent furrows close enough together so that when the plants mature their leaves will touch. This close planting blocks out light and discourages weed growth between the furrows. The shade made by the plants conserves water.

Mark each furrow with a popsicle stick or something similar, recording the plant's name and date of planting on the stick. I also write down how much I need to thin the seedlings once they are up a few inches. Water the bed with a watering-can fitted with a fine rose or a fine spray attachment on your hose. Water lightly, moving the spray back and forth across the bed until the soil is shiny. Don't let the water puddle: you might wash your seeds away.

I cover the seedbed with a floating row cover to help maintain an evenly moist bed and to prevent animals from bothering the planting. This lightweight row cover used by organic growers is water permeable. It provides even warmth, protects against damaging winds and is the most effective and least toxic form of insect control. It is so light that the plant lifts up the cover as it grows. Don't let the seedbed dry out. If the days are warm, your seeds will sprout within a week or a little more. If they don't, replant them and be more diligent about keeping the seedbed moist.

Composting is the most important aspect of gardening. Make sure you compost your kitchen and yard waste, bury it, pile it, just do it. Your soil can't feed you unless you feed it. Use your composted material as mulch around the plants. If you bury compost, after a few months, plant a perennial or a tomato plant where you buried the composted material.

Drip irrigation is the final piece in preparing a garden. Soaker hoses are sold locally at ABC Pump, Alco and True Value. It is best to bury them under a mulch of composted manure and decomposed wood chips to prevent unnecessary evaporation. You can find wood chips in various stages of decomposition at the local dump. Use a variety of woods, not solely cedar or pine.

Plant spring vegetables now. April 10th is our date for planting warm weather plants. Be sure to plant legumes, peas and beans: they loosen the soil and fix it with nitrogen. Find bargains at The Dollar Store and Alco - seeds for 25 cents! Peaceful Valley Farm and Gardener's Supply sell the row covers on line, or ask One Way Nursery to order them for you.

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