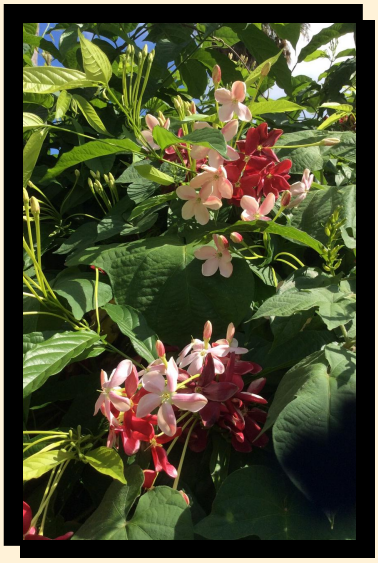
Home Grown Newsletter
September 2020 Edition

Plant of the Month
Rangoon Creeper (*Quisqualis indica*)

Paul Winski, Harris County Extension Agent, Horticulture

Are you looking for a vine that will give your landscape that tropical feel, flower clusters that change color as they mature and delivers a sweet-fruity fragrance? Then the Rangoon Creeper (*Quisqualis indica*) should be on your list of must have plants.

Rangoon Creeper is native to tropical Asia and performs brilliantly in our growing conditions. It is a fast growing, sprawling vine that will grow as high and wide as space permits. It will need support such as a fence or arbor, but it may also be managed as a wandering shrub. The vine is evergreen in mild winters but freezes back when temperatures are below 32 F. My plant has been in the ground for at least 15 years and always returns in all its glory.



Rangoon Creeper produces clusters of 2" slender, tubular flowers that produce the sweet fragrance that is most noticeable at dawn and dusk. The new flowers that open in the evening are white, as they mature, they turn pink then red over the course of its 3-day life-cycle. This color change allows them to be visited by moths at night when they are white and set by a set of different pollinators when they are pink and red.

So, if you are looking to add color and fragrance to your garden then by all means consider adding Rangoon Creeper, you will not be disappointed.

In This Issue:

"5" Steps to Having a Fall Vegetable Garden

Kimberly Perry, Extension Agent Agnr, Cooperative Extentsion Program (CEP)

During the month of July we discussed the key components every urban gardener should know in order to produce a bountiful fall vegetable garden.

These "5" helpful steps to begin any garden for the novice or seasoned gardener apply to the spring and fall.

Step 1: The first step to successful gardening is to analyze your space and sketch out your garden design. This will help you determine if your area is located in full sun, part sun or shade. Beginning each season with this step allows you to set a budget and begin the season organized.

Step 2: The second step (which was a hot topic of discussion), was to determine which vegetables you would like to grow. Selecting vegetables allows you to determine the type of growing conditions each plant requires and whether you begin from seed or transplants. This is a very important step to know as many seeds can take weeks to germinate, and a number of plants do not transition from seedlings to the garden very successfully. This step is very helpful in knowing whether or not you're planting annuals or perennials.

Step 3: The third step is soil. This is one of the most important steps whether you're a novice or a seasoned gardener. Preparing the soil or growing medium can mean different things, but for the novice its encouraged to remove weeds, and amend your garden soil with compost. Depending on if you are growing in raised beds or on large acreage, the soil may need to be tested to determine the nutrient levels.

Step 4: The fourth step is to begin with the most environmentally friendly chemicals. Its inevitable that you will become familiar with the good, the bad and the ugly as it relates to insects, fungus and disease. Your keen instincts will want to take them out, and take them out quickly. Before purchasing the first thing on the shelves, take time to read the labels and understand the difference between man-made chemicals and organic materials that can be used to battle insects, fungus and disease.

Step 5: The fifth step is ... YOU ARE READY TO GO AND GROW!

Elements of Landscape Design

Brandi Keller, Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

Line, color, and texture are a few of the elements used to create beautiful landscapes in our front and backyards. Landscape design is an art that provides an order to our outdoor space. If you didn't get a chance to check out the "Elements of Landscape Design" lecture, be sure to visit our You Tube page provided on the last page.

LINE

Line defines space, draws attention, and creates tone. In this example at the Nature Discovery Center, line draws the eye down the path, but the pollinator flowers have softened the hard edge for a natural feel.

COLOR

Color adds interest, draws or detracts the eye in a direction, and can attract wildlife. A monochromatic theme like this one has a simple, clean look that can highlight bolder leaves, barks, and textures.

TEXTURE

Texture in leaves, flowers, bark and branching adds interest and a visual variety of movement and tone. The fine texture of this Pride of Barbados contrasts well with the course, thick leaves of a banana.

Composting and Mulching Basics

Shannon Dietz, County Extension Agent, Ag and Natural Resources

Landscape refuse such as leaves, grass clippings and trimmings accounts for up to 20 percent of the waste being placed in landfills. Bans on outdoor burning and laws that limit dumping of leaves and grass clippings into landfills make composting and mulching attractive alternatives for managing yard refuse and recycling natural materials.

Composting is the most practical and convenient way to handle your yard refuse because it's cheaper and easier than bagging or taking to a dump site. Although in time, un-composted materials will eventually break down adding these materials directly to the soil without first composting, you may have some undesirable effects. One example is when adding un-composted leaves directly into the soil, microbes will compete with plant roots for soil nitrogen during leaf decomposition. This competition for nitrogen can cause nitrogen deficiency producing poor plant growth.

The addition of composted materials also improves soil physical properties such as infiltration, drainage and water holding capacity. Composted material is much easier to handle and mix with soil than un-composted material.

Decomposition of organic material in the pile depends on maintaining microbial activity. Efficient breakdown occurs if aeration, moisture, particle size and nutrient levels, mainly nitrogen, are maintained for optimum microbial activity.

Oxygen is required for microbes to decompose organic waste efficiently. Some decomposition occurs in the absence of oxygen, called anaerobic, however, the process is slow and foul odors may develop. Mixing your pile once or twice a month provides the necessary oxygen to assist in the breakdown process.

Adequate moisture is essential for successful breakdown. Proper moisture encourages for growth of microorganisms that breakdown the organic matter into humus (not the bean and chip kind! Haha). If rainfall is limited, water the pile periodically to maintain a steady decomposition rate.

The smaller the size of the organic refuse matter, the more quickly it can be consumed by the microbes. A low-cost method of reducing the size of fallen tree leaves is to mow the lawn before raking. If your mower has a bag attachment, the shredded leaves can be collected directly.

Temperature of the compost pile is very important to the biological activity that will be taking place. Low outside temperatures slow the activity down, while warmer temps we experience here in Texas speed up the decomposition. Two types of microbes that make up the decomposition process fall into two categories a) mesophilic, live and function in temps between 50 to 113 degrees F and b) Thermophilic, these thrive in temps between 113- and 158- degrees F. A well-mixed, adequatley working compost pile will heat to temperatures between 110- and 160- degrees F as the microbes feed on the organic materials. These high temperatures will help destroy weed seeds and disease organisms within the pile.

For more valuable information on appropriate materials for composting and how to build a simple compost bin, please click on the link for research based material on the ***Agriculture & Natural Resources>Useful ANR links>Compost>Composting Links***

Social Media/Websites

[Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Harris County Horticulture]

[Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Harris County Ag & Natural Resources]

[Harris County Master Gardeners]

[Texas A&M AgriLife Extension]

[YouTube Horticulture Channel]

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SAVE THE DATE!

HOUSTON URBAN FOOD CONFERENCE

- GOING VIRTUAL IN 2020!
- OCTOBER 23, 2020
- *9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
- *REGISTRATION OPENING SOON!

If you would like to unsubscribe to this newsletter, please submit an email @ julie.menn@ag.tamu.edu

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