



April, 2013

Volume 2, Issue 2

Hale County Master Gardeners

Kalanchoe Daigremontiana

By: Cindy Simmons

This past summer I bought a beautiful tub of succulents from Max and Marion Jones's garden business. I thought the plants would winter in the garage, but the first hard freeze killed them all. The tub was a beautiful arrangement of seven uniquely-shaped and colored succulent plants.

One of the plants produced tiny green plantlets (bulbils) around the margin of each leaf. Before the freeze, I had picked 4 or 5 of these baby plants and started them in pots in the house. They made the transition without a problem and started producing mini-me's on their leaves at about 3 inches tall.

It was just recently that I Googled a description of the plant to identify it. It is *Kalanchoe Daigremontiana* (aka "Mother of Thousands", "Mother of Millions", "Alligator Plant", "Devil's Backbone", and "Mexican Hat Plant"). It is a wonderfully interesting plant and easy to grow. However, I was quite surprised to learn that all parts are poisonous to small children and pets. Nine little starts have been sitting on my kitchen cabinets for the last six months.

The plant can reach heights of 3 feet; mine was in the range of 18 to 24 inches. In the five months I have had the starters in the house, they have grown to about 6 inches in height. I have also observed that the stalk itself has put out roots at about one inch intervals. A leaf will also root quite easily.

Further reading has indicated that the plant is considered extremely invasive in warm climates where it will take over flowerbeds, yards, and pasture lands. It is apparently quite a problem in Florida. The Department of Primary Industries in Australia has been trying to eradicate it for twenty years with little success. Since mine froze out so quickly, I think it might be safe for this area. One source said that 2,4-D will kill it.

All this being said, I am going to have numerous starts if any of the Master Gardeners want them. Mine grew happily in a big container on my patio and did not re-plant itself anywhere else in the courtyard. I did not have blooms even though I understand that it does bloom.



I had thought these might be a good plant for the downtown planters; however, I don't believe we can risk the liability of having poisonous plants in public planters.

As you read the blogs about this plant, you see a great deal of positive commentary from people who like it and remember it fondly from their childhood, and you see a great deal of negative commentary from people who have had it invade their greenhouses and yards.

Pasted from <<http://mountaincrestgardens.com/kalanchoe-daigremontiana.html>>

PEPPERS IN THE ROUND

Judy Heinrich, Smith County Master Gardener
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

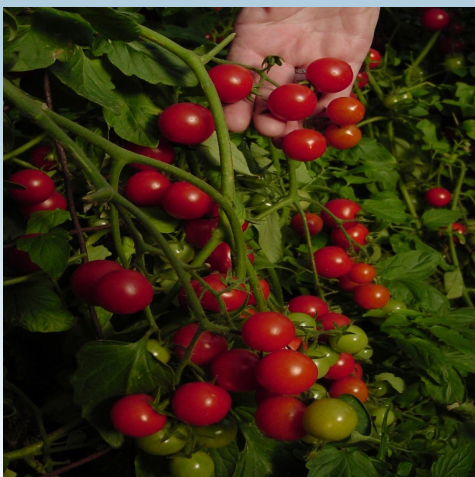
Large-scale vegetable growers use long rows for efficiency but those of us with smaller plots can try other ideas. Here's a "pepper ring" plan that can make watering, feeding, and picking easy.

1. You'll need one 5-gallon plastic bucket (some call them pickle buckets) for irrigation, plus an extra for watering/mixing fertilizer. For the "irrigation" bucket, drill a series of small holes around its side, about 1-2 inches up from the bottom and 1-2 inches apart.
2. Clear and till (or loosen with a turning fork) a circle about 5-6 feet in diameter. Add any needed amendments depending on your soil's condition; you can also work in a time-release fertilizer at this time.
3. Make a slight mound in the center of the circle and place your "irrigation" bucket on the mound. You can build a little ring of soil up on the outer edge of the circle or even dress it up with bricks or stones.
4. Plant your peppers in a circle, about halfway between the bucket and the outer edge of the ring. Considering mature size of the plants, you can probably fit five or six.
5. To water plants, fill your extra bucket and then pour the water into the irrigation bucket. The water will seep out the holes, run down the slightly mounded soil, and soak down to the roots of your plants. No more wasted water on leaves!

You could also water by letting a hose run into your irrigation bucket, but I like the water pressure I get by dumping a whole bucket-full in at once. Using the extra bucket also helps gauge water quantity and is great for mixing/adding water soluble fertilizers, compost tea, fish emulsion, etc. The same ring idea will also work for other shrubby vegetables like patio tomatoes. You can make irrigation buckets for each ring, or just move one irrigation bucket around.



New Texas Superstar cherry tomato judged four times sweeter than others.



Not only is it one of the sweetest, but is one of the easiest to grow and higher yielding cherry tomatoes, said David Rodriguez, AgriLife Extension horticulture agent in Bexar County and member of the Texas Superstar board.

For this reason and others, the BHN-968 cherry tomato has been named a Texas Superstar for 2013, Rodriguez said.

Texas Superstar plants undergo extensive tests throughout the state by Texas A&M AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension horticulturists, said Dr. Brent Pemberton, AgriLife Research horticulturist and chair of the Texas Superstar executive board.

To be designated a Superstar, a plant must not just be beautiful but also perform well for consumers and growers throughout Texas. Superstars must also be easy to propagate, which should ensure the plants are not only widely available throughout Texas but also reasonably priced.

“The BHN-968 tomato is the most naturally disease-resistant cherry tomato we have seen in our evaluation trials,” Rodriguez said. “It is genetically resistant to the diseases of verticillium wilt and fusarium wilt, as well as tobacco mosaic virus and tomato spotted wilt virus.” It is also the first cherry tomato variety found to be nematode resistant since Small Fry, a tomato developed by AgriLife Research horticulturists, according to Pemberton.

The BHN-968 is also one of the most flavorful varieties available to home gardeners, according to Rodriguez. In taste tests he and San Antonio Master Gardeners performed, the BHN-968 was rated “four times sweeter than any comparable cherry tomato.” “The taste panels consisted of 10 to 12 individuals ranging in age from 50 to 83,” Rodriguez said. “This is the first tomato of any type to be taste-tested by AgriLife Extension to receive a unanimous favorable rating at every testing.”

The BHN-968 has also been tested by agents and, in a way, even given the ‘kid test,’ and got high marks, he said. “We’ve used it quite a bit locally in our children’s vegetable garden program, as well as our youth gardening program,” Rodriguez said. “As productive as it is, and as hardy as it is, every child gets to taste a few, even when the teacher is only growing a few plants.” Gardeners will most likely only be able to find transplants at home improvement stores and nurseries, according to Rodriguez. “If they want to start their own seeds, the only big seed company that currently makes seed available for both commercial and home gardeners is Johnny’s Selected Seeds,” he said. Gardeners may also locate a retailer by visiting the Texas Superstar program website at <http://texassuperstar.com/> and clicking on “Retailers,” Pemberton noted.

Bloom Where You Are Planted

Maria Vasquez—Hale County Master Gardener

Woohoo we have made it to spring! Last time I wrote we had snow on the ground and I was excited for my spring bulbs. Since then my daffodils succumbed to the big wind storm that blew all night but for a while I had some glorious blooms from crocus, daffodils and dwarf irises and now my tulips are blooming but the wind may have affected their blossoms somewhat. Well there is always next year. In the meantime don't forget to fertilize your daffodils, tulips and other spring bulbs, once they finish blooming, to encourage the roots to grow and the bulbs to multiply. Allow the tops to die back naturally after the flowers fade; this too helps provide the plant with the energy needed to grow and spread. If you have not planted spring bulbs now is the time to visit gardens and gardening centers to see what you like. That way you can order some later spring bulbs for you to enjoy.

It is now safe to start planting this from seed or buy plants. ed for this area...when I first plants later I learned to bloom in this area. Plant a few con-soil you can afford. Potted also need water at least once a area when it gets too hot. You can start planting some vegetables at this time such as cucumbers, eggplant, corn, and squash. Tomatoes and pepper need warmer soil but can be planted with the protection of wrapped cages. If you started seeds indoors it might be time to move some of these into your starter bed. Don't forget that in April our area can have a late freeze so watch the weather and be ready to protect your plants.

Now is also a great time to develop those areas you have planned and dreamt of. Maybe add a moon garden near a sitting area so that in the evenings to come you can sit there with a glass of your favorite beverage and enjoy the wonderful fragrances of a white bloom and silver illuminated garden by the moonlight. I recommend adding the sounds of water and chimes. Here are some fragrant night-bloomers that do well in this area: Four-O'clocks, Moonflower vines, Evening Primrose, Sweet Scented Nicotiana, Iceberg roses, Stock, Snapdragons and Angle's Trumpets....I cheat and add potted tuberose. For the silver illumination add some Dusty Miller, Lamb's Ear and Japanese Silver Grass. If you are not into flowers then how about planting a small herb garden herbs originated from the Mediterranean, a hot dry climate, and therefore thrive in this area. A nice sunny place with good draining soil is a must for this type of garden. If you have a location right outside your back door near the kitchen this is great for your garden because then you can run out



in the year for fall planting. I have included some photos of my

your annuals, perennials, herbs and some vegetables. You can do Remember to plant heat and drought tolerant plants that are suit-started gardening I wanted an English garden and many dead where I am planted and have found some great plants that work tainers and hanging baskets and remember to use the best potting plants will need liquid fertilizer on a regular schedule and will day once the summer heat sets in. I move my pots into a shaded



area when it gets too hot. You can start planting some vegetables at this time such as cucumbers, eggplant, corn, and squash. Tomatoes and pepper need warmer soil but can be planted with the protection of wrapped cages. If you started seeds indoors it might be time to move some of these into your starter bed. Don't forget that in April our area can have a late freeze so watch the weather and be ready to protect your plants.



and snip the herb you need as you are cooking. You can get great herb plants in this area and they cost about the same price as a box of herbs in the produce isle and are fresher from the garden! When laying out your garden you will want to be able to reach your herbs from all sides without stepping into the box, an area about four feet wide is a good size. Plant the herbs you use in cooking such as basil, oregano, thyme, chives, sage, cilantro, parsley and tarragon. Herbs also dry well for use in the cold months.



Continue to pull weeds, water as needed, fertilize and mulch your beds later this month. If you mulch too early the mulch will not to allow the soil to warm. The mulch will help soil retain moisture and it represses weeds. You can get free mulch from our local landfill. Fertilizers

for our area should be high in nitrogen so look for a 4-1-2 ratio. Follow the directions carefully and remember that too much fertilizer can burn and damage plants. **Happy gardening!**

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***Texas
Master Gardener***SM



Farmer's Market coming to Gebo's parking lot on Thursday's!

Date to be announced. (Probably sometime in May or June) If you have homegrown vegetables that you would like to sell call the Extension office 806.291.5267.