



Horti-Bull

HORTICULTURAL BULLETIN

Published Monthly by the SAN ANTONIO MEN'S GARDEN CLUB
A club for Men and WOMEN interested in all aspects of gardening
WEBSITE: mensgardenclubofsa.org



Volume 2026

March

Number 3

MARCH PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Alberto Del Rio

SPRING IS ALMOST HERE! I've been enjoying this warmer weather we've been having. The last couple of weeks have been warmer than usual – a very welcome change from the cold of early February.

This month, to celebrate Spring, we'll welcome David Rodriguez who will give us some very pertinent advice and assistance for our Spring gardens. With the warmer days of March at hand, we look forward to planting a wide variety of delicious toma-

atoes and other vegetables. David will keep us on the right track.

Again this year, the MGCSA was honored to provide a panel of judges for the Alamo Regional Science and Engineering Fair at St. Mary's University. Amazingly, this was the 70th year of this event which gives so much encouragement and support to young students who are so interested in Science – they are indeed our future. This year was also a milestone for our Club – in a surprise event, the Science Fair staff presented the MGCSA with a beautiful engraved plaque expressing their thanks for our decades of steadfast support. This beautiful plaque will be at our March meeting for all to see.

I also want to offer my special thanks to Paul Huegel. Paul has done all of the paperwork involving our MGC judging panel and the awards we present to the Science Fair students. The work is complex and hectic and Paul has done a magnificent job for many years. **Thanks so much Paul!**

This month we're all looking forward to the annual SAWS 'Spring Bloom' event at SAWS Headquarters. Please consider bringing plants to our MGC sales booth at that event. We need veggies, herbs, and other plants desired for Spring planting. Plants in 4" pots are especially needed. They are easy to carry home by our customers.

This is also the time to make preparations for our work at the Home and Garden Show at Freeman Coliseum, 27-29 March, and the upcoming Hollywood Park Community Yard Sale. We'll need plants and volunteers. Please take a moment to sign up for these events.

I'm looking forward to our March meeting and to visit with all of our members who do so much to make the MGCSA a success and constantly support so many of our famous horticultural events.

See you soon!

Alberto Del Rio



The Next MGC Meeting

Thursday March 5th at the

San Antonio Garden Center, **1310 N. New Braunfels Ave**, Corner of N. New Braunfels Ave and Funston Place, part of the San Antonio Botanical Gardens Complex
6:30PM Social—7:00PM Meeting

February Speaker is Mr. David Rodriguez whose topic will be: 'Spring has Sprung'

EVENTS IN MARCH

Earthwise Living Day 7 March

At The Leon Valley Community Center

SAWS Spring Bloom 14 March

At SAWS Headquarters

Hollywood Park Yard Sale 19, 20, 21 March

At 222 Yosemite Dr., HW Park

Home & Garden Show 27-29 March

At the Joe Freeman Coliseum EXPO Hall

LATER IN 2026

Basil Fest 16 May

Festival of Flowers 30 May

The **Children's Vegetable Garden Program at the San Antonio Botanical Garden** is a long-standing, hands-on initiative where children aged 6–16 grow their own produce. Running in 2 sessions, spring and fall, participants manage a 3.5' x 28' plot. They receive expert guidance from Master Gardeners and other experienced gardeners on planting, nurturing, and harvesting. Your participation is needed and welcomed. For more information, call Vallerie Hartfield at 210-240-1466, or go to the Botanical Garden's website.

From Dr. Calvin Finch



Area meteorologists seem to think we are through with freezing temperatures in the San Antonio area. That is good and bad. We don't necessarily need freezing temperatures but for those gardeners trying to grow fruit trees the required "chill hours" occur between temperatures of 32 degrees and 45 degrees. If you have low chill peach trees such as

Florida Prince (150 hours) it may bloom in March, but Florida King (450 hours) and La Feliciana (600 hours) probably won't receive enough cold to perform well in the spring. All of the plums, apples, and pears will also probably be sluggish and unproductive because of the lack of chill hours. Just prune them as required and spray them with a fungicide and malathion each week if they bloom and set fruit. Limit the spraying to the fruit trees.

Gardeners in the Hill Country and North of San Antonio such as in Austin, have more flexibility with fruit trees because they receive more "chill hours". If you are interested in trying to grow some peach trees or other fruit in your backyard despite our erratic rainfall and chill hours, seek out the low chill selections from your favorite nursery. For more information on peaches obtain the book "Texas Peach Handbook" authored by Jim Kamas and Larry Stein. I also authored an article on growing peaches that was published in the SA Express News in February 2026.

It is too early to fertilize the lawn, wait until you have mowed real grass twice, usually about May 1. What you can do though is to aerate and top dress the lawn. Rent an aerator to penetrate and pull-out plugs of soil and then spread a half inch of compost over the aerated lawn. You will see a response in early summer as the process reduces soil compaction, enhances gas exchange in the root system, improves nutrient efficiency and both increases water holding and circulation in the lawn. Some lawn care contractors also provide the service.

If you had sand burs last year it is time to apply a preemergent herbicide such as Crew, Barricade, or Dimension to reduce their return. Follow the label instructions.

In the vegetable garden your greens, onions, rutabagas, spinach, and carrots should have started recovering from the freeze in February. Now is a good time to pot- up tomatoes. Pot them up because the soil and air is too cold to plant them directly in the garden until April 1. Place transplants in a #1 container and place them in full sun out of the wind. If temperatures are forecast to fall below 40 degrees F, temporarily move the container and plant into a warmer shelter.

March is also a good time to plant potatoes, green beans, cucumbers, and English peas.

In the flower garden the stocks, pentas, and alyssum mostly froze back dead, but the snapdragons, sweet peas, calendula, dianthus, and cyclamen look like they will recover for a spring bloom period. As expected, the pansies and violas showed some wrinkling but are nearly all already fully recovered.

To fill gaps most nurseries did a good job of protecting their stock and have plenty of replacement transplants some of which is at sale prices. There are even some of the summer annuals already available including geraniums and "Whopper Begonias"! Another interesting development that some of the zinnia seed dropped by last years flowers have already germinated.

Don't forget the Monarch butterflies. They will be back in our area in April so do what you can to have nectar plants such as mist flower, zinnias, blue curl, Porter weed, butterfly weed, tropical milkweed, penta, coreopsis, and bee balm in bloom. Hopefully you also planted some native milkweeds such as zizotes, antelope horn, green, showy, and swamp that will offer egg-laying sites.

To review the availability of free Monarch and Milkweed classes in San Antonio, Floresville, and New Braunfels visit the Milberger's Nursery website. Free milkweed transplants and seeds are provided to attendees who register by calling the provided phone numbers.

MGCSA Officers for 2026		
President	Alberto Del Rio	210-518-5097
1st V.P	Charles Bartlett	210-337-6428
2nd V.P.	Vallerie Hartfield	210-240-1466
3rd V.P	Robin Van Dusen	210-845-6055
Treasurer	Paul Huegel	210-385-8972
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2026-2028		
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Other		
EX Officio	Elena Schriener	210-268-8222
HB Advertising	Paul Huegel	
Historian	Paul Huegel	
Webmaster	Ivan Roman	
HB Editor	Larry Cromer	210-521-5350

MARCH Refreshments

A thru L

IT IS YOUR TURN A thru L'ers. We encourage you to help clean and straighten up after the meeting so everyone can leave as soon as possible.

MEMBERSHIP

Attendance at our 5 February 2026 meeting
36 members and 2 guest.

Happy Birthday to all February births.
Healing and recovery to all who are sick.

Strength, comfort, peace, and love to all who are coping with losses.



Mr. David Rodriguez is our guest speaker for March, and his topic : 'Spring has Sprung'. David is no stranger to the MGC and has been our speaker many times . He can be counted on to speak on current, hands-on gardening principles. The topic tells us he will be discussing what we should be doing in preparing our gardens for the spring season. He thrives on responding to questions from the audience, and a little face-to-face chitchatting.

A very short excerpt from the 'Texas A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE' Brochure.
 "David Rodriguez is deeply rooted in the Texas gardening and landscape plant world. He started working at the prime age of ten with local nurseries which included Grimm's Garden Centers and Landscape, Wolfe Nurseries and Calloway's. David then went off to Texas A&M University and earned bachelor's and master's degrees in horticultural sciences. Before and during these formal educational years, he often worked seven days a week to save up money for his educational and living expenses."

February Speaker

Robin Norton Carranco, Events Manager and Pollinator Plant Expert from Rainbow Gardens Nursery spoke on Creating and maintaining Pollinator Gardens. Before we begin to dig in the soil, she said, we should have a master plan. Begin with soil preparation by using a soil conditioner or compost. If you want to attract butterflies and bees, remember that both love a sunny location with some shade, especially during our harsh summer months. A water source is another desirable feature since both bees and butterflies like to enjoy a cool drink. When planning your plant list, include nectar plants and host plants for butterflies. Nectar plants also attract hummingbirds and bees. A more attractive garden has smaller plants in front and taller ones further back. Colorful plants attract more butterflies. Beneficial insects like ladybugs also enjoy our pollinator gardens. Robin further discussed butterflies and their life cycle. Our members enthusiastically added their comments and experiences with their own gardens.



Our President, Alberto Del Rio, just had to get his picture taken with our guest speaker.



Mark Weigand, Ed Elbel, Jeff Brown, and Charles Bartlett are at the ever-popular 'Door prize table'.

Joe Shiners is a master 'Show and Teller'

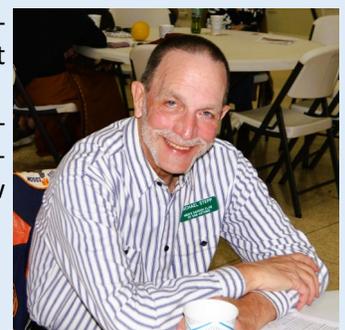


****Membership Spotlight****

Our March 2026 Membership Spotlight shines on Michael (Mike) Stepp. Mike, originally from the Bluegrass State of Kentucky, has been a member of the MGC for 12 years. He states that the educational offerings and socializing with those who have the horticultural knowledge is very appealing to him. Mike is no wallflower, he is most likely to be involved in con-

versations with our guest speakers and club members about things that grow in dirt

He loves growing Cherry Tomatoes, and states he hopes to become a REAL gardener and grow his own food.



MARGARET KANE'S LEGACY 40 YEARS LATER

From Charles Bartlett

Many of our older MGC members may remember Margaret Kane. She was known internationally for her knowledge of a very wide array of plants. She was named 'Gardener of the Year' by the San Antonio Express-News, way back in 1968, named a Horticultural Hero by Texas A&M University, and was a well-known author and newspaper gardening columnist. She travelled widely and introduced numerous plants to the San Antonio area, including unusual Ginger plants and Freesia laxa. She was called "the ginger lady" for years, and for decades provided many interesting plants for San Antonio Garden Center plant sales. Margaret was a friend and strong supporter of many garden organizations, including the Men's Garden Club of San Antonio and when she passed away in 2005, it was a loss to the San Antonio horticultural scene.

Margaret and I were both very interested in members of the Ginger family, and on one of my visits to her garden, she gave me a handful of bulbs and asked me to try growing Freesia laxa in my garden. 40 years later, they are still thriving – with little care – a colorful treasure for busy gardeners.

Freesia laxa is a unique and strikingly beautiful, rarely grown Spring-blooming bulb native to grasslands in East and South Africa, but is easily naturalized in southern gardens. Freesia laxa species have been in cultivation for 200 years, but are rarely seen in commerce today, although it is an extremely reliable small bulb. It blooms in San Antonio from February through late March on 12" stalks going dormant by early summer in the Texas heat. The early blooming feature of this floral treasure will be much appreciated by your pollinator friends. This underused little red-flowered beauty is now undergoing a resurgence in popularity due to its easy going cultural requirements and abundant flowering.

Freesia laxa is a cormous heirloom perennial of the Iris family. Through the years, it has been known by many different names – Painted Petals, Woodland Painted Petals, false Freesia, scarlet Freesia, Anomatheca laxa, Anomatheca cruenta, and Lapeirousia laxa. In its native habitat, it favors rocky, dryer areas and even understory locations in temperate forests. The most common forms have 1 1/2" brilliant scarlet flowers with a darker red blotch on the lower petals, but there is a white form with red blotches, and even a pure white form. Even the large seeds are red and grow and bloom quickly when planted.

After a hot summer dormancy, the foliage returns in the Fall and grows all Winter. Freesia laxa is cold hardy in USDA zones 7b to 10, and although the bulb is not large, the plant

seems to persist in the garden with little effort. It's a floral powerhouse with branched sprays of red flowers that never fail to put on quite a show. Although plants perform best with moderate moisture, they are amazingly drought-tolerant even in brutally hot Texas summers. They thrive in warm, dry climates, making them suitable for rock gardens and semi-shaded or sunny borders. No insect or disease problems have been seen in Central Texas.

This plant is especially popular in Europe and has won the Royal Horticultural Society 'Award of Merit' in England, and thrives in a wide variety of soils – mildly acidic, neutral, or moderately alkaline. It enjoys sunny to partially shaded locations. The corms are approximately 1" in diameter, and can be planted in the Fall to a depth of 2-4 inches. Although the bulbs are not too large, they pack a punch when in bloom! They add a unique, exotic touch to gardens, and are ideal for eye-catching displays in containers or in the landscape.

This is another example of an heirloom plant that is time-tested, well adapted to our climate, easy to grow, and essentially maintenance-free. Its low maintenance and striking appearance make it a rewarding plant for novice – or very busy – gardeners.



Even though such heirloom plants may not be easy to find in our local stores, thanks to very generous and knowledgeable gardeners and neighbors, such as Margaret Kane, we still have the pleasure of growing beautiful, carefree, unique flowering plants with a long history, that we can share with future generations of gardeners. For all of those heirloom plant treasures, we owe a debt of gratitude to our Horticultural Hero's such as Lynn Lowery, Pat McNeal, and Margaret Kane. They are gone – but not forgotten – and their legacy lives on today in our own gardens.

Ronnie Grell
Managing Partner

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FORTY YEARS AND STILL JUDGING

by Paul D. Huegel

We are proud to have been participants on 21 and 22 February at the Alamo Regional Science and Engineering Fair (ARSEF) for forty of its seventy year history. The Alamo Regional Science and Engineering Fair (ARSEF) promotes interest in the pursuit of scientific inquiry among middle and high school students through an annual meeting and research presentation competition. Each year the Alamo's best and brightest middle and high school students qualify for ARSEF out of more than 1,500 students competing at School and District Science Fairs for awards.

This is a great opportunity for people interested in meeting the next generation of young scientists from Central Texas. One of our most important goals of the MGCSA is to foster the spirit and passion for horticulture and the science of botany and other related sciences with the youth of the Alamo Region. By providing judges for the ARSEF, we are inspired by the quality of research and enthusiasm of the entrants over the years. This year was no different than the other 39 years of participation and our MGCSA judges were proud to honor ten students with the Men's Garden Club of San Antonio Charles Bartlett Botany Award. The following students received a framed letter of recognition and a monetary stipend:

- AKIL PINNENTI_ First Place winner in the Junior Division – Environmental Science**
- ALYSON ZAMARRIPA_ Second Place winner in the Junior Division – Botany**
- AARHA BHARDWAJ_ First Place winner in the Senior Division – Botany**
- KAYDEN KEENEY_ Second Place winner in the Senior Division – Botany**
- EVA WIMBERLY_ First Place winner in the Senior Division – Environmental Science**
- JEHAN HALUWANA_ Second Place winner in the Senior Division – Environmental Science**
- DORCAS SOLIS_ First Place Team winner in the Senior Division -Environmental Science**
- NAOMI WIMBERLY_ First Place Team winner in the Senior Division – Environmental Science**
- ZACHORY WITTEWER_ Second Place Team winner in the Senior Division – Environmental Science**
- JONATHAN PICKETT_ Second Place Team winner in the Senior Division – Environmental Science**

I would like to thank my fellow MGCSA volunteer judges who did an excellent job of selecting this year's winners. We reached a consensus on the winners without any major differences of opinion. This year's judges were the same as last year and included Charles Bartlett (award benefactor), Alberto Del Rio, Joe Shinnars, Keith Masa, Robin Van Dusen, Andrew Waring and yours truly. You might note that there were no female MGCSA volunteers for the students to see that we are a mens and womens garden club which was unfortunate. Hopefully, we will correct this omission next year.

The Awards Ceremony took place the next day and I was pleased we had some of our judges attend including Charles Bartlett, Alberto Del Rio, Keith Masa, Andrew Waring and yours truly. Alberto presented the awards to each student on stage and I assisted. To our great surprise the ARSEF presented the MGCSA an engraved plaque for our 40 years of faithful service as participants in this worthwhile event.



MGC President displays the plaque presented to the club by Mr. Lane Smiley, an official of the ARSEF.

At upper right are our judges for the competition: Alberto Del Rio, Charles Bartlett, Robin Van Dusen, Paul Huegel, Joe Shinnars and Mike Stepp. On bottom row is Paul Huegel with ASREF Founder, Ms. Rose Perez and "she has a special place in her heart for the Men's Garden Club". Next are a stage full of Happy Competition Winners



THE SAWS SPRING BLOOM IS ALWAYS A GREAT 3 HOURS

- First 1,000 adult guest receive a free Water Saver plant —
- **Plant Sales** ---
- Lectures by Gardening Experts —
- Landscape makeover tips —
- MGCSA Children's Garden —

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS FOR TRANSPORT, SET-UP & TEAR-DOWN, & SALES



Free event



Saturday, March 14



9 a.m. to noon



2800 US 281 North



**SAN ANTONIO BIG BLOOM
HOME & GARDEN SHOW
MARCH 27-29, 2026**

AT THE JOE FREEMAN COLISEUM EXPOSITION HALL

Howard Garrett "The Dirt Doctor"

FREE Planting Project for Kids

Big Bloom Plant Sale

Big Bloom Bingo

FREE ENTRY FOR ALL

This is a resurrection of the Home and Garden Shows that we participated in a few years ago. It promises to be more gardening focused than previously and thus will be more to our liking. We will try to give it a good shot and see how our members support it with their volunteering. The hours of operation are: Friday 2pm-6pm, Sat 10am-6pm, Sun 11am-5pm. VOLUNTEER for a shift, spend time before and after your shift taking in the other things to see and do at the show.

HOLLYWOOD PARK PLANT SALE

Hollywood Park calls it the 'Community Garage Sale' and we call it the 'Hollywood Park Plant Sale'. This three day event is a real test of endurance for our club as the doors open at 8am and special handling of our plants is necessary because of the vegetation hungry deer population. The special handling consist of moving the tables of plants into and out of the backyard when we are not there. Ida Santiago has graciously once-again loaned us her front yard for our sale location. **THANK YOU IDA.** Our goal is to fill her front yard' with plants that the folks in Hollywood Park will want to take home and use in their homes and gardens. As with our other sales events, your spare plants are welcomed.



The above events will be discussed in depth at the March 5 meeting . (Don't let that scare you away). Sign up sheets will be available and our president will ensure all your questions and concerns will be addressed. As you can see, we are selling! Your spare plants, grown for the event plants, and not needed plants will be appreciated.

IRISH HERITAGE DAY

From Jeffry Brown

The 38th Annual Irish Heritage Day took place on February 22 at the Leon Valley Community Center from noon to 5 p.m. The festive occasion featured live music by “The Happy Out”, a three-man band, and the Kelly Singers, directed by Tom Ewing. A Celtic market featured many Irish inspired creations and unique handmade crafts. Finally a “River Dance” group of high school aged boys and girls performed. There were also delicious drinks and treats for all to enjoy. In attendance were Irish Diplomats from the Houston Consulate. The Men’s Garden Club had its sales booth outside the main door as it has done now for several years. Representing the Club were Ken Wolfgram and Alberto Del Rio, president. There was an inviting selection of plants for sale to all that came to the festivities. The event, as in past years, was well attended and our plant sales were brisk!



1. A table of beautiful plants ready for sale at Heritage Day. 2. Official Irish Piper, Dan Calkins, pipes in the festivities. 3. Ken Wolfgram helps a customer select her plant.



MYSTERY SEED PACKAGES

AUSTIN — Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller and the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) today urged Texans to remain vigilant as unidentified seeds continue to arrive at their doorsteps. Since February 2025, TDA has collected seed deliveries at 109 locations across the Lone Star State, totaling 1,101 packs of unsolicited seeds. While small in appearance, these packages represent a serious and ongoing threat to the nation’s agricultural biosecurity.

“At a glance, this might seem like a small problem, but this is serious business,” said Commissioner Miller. “The possible introduction of an invasive species to the state via these seeds poses real risks to Texas families and the agriculture industry. We need everyone to report these packages when they arrive so the contents may be gathered and disposed of properly.”

TDA first became aware of the issue in early February when a resident in Clute, Texas, received an unsolicited package sent from China, containing unidentified seeds and an unknown liquid. In response, TDA immediately warned Texans to exercise extreme caution if they receive packages of unknown origin.

Since that report, it has been discovered that the mystery seed resurgence was not limited to Texas. Similar examples surfaced across the country in 2025, including reports from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. The last unsolicited seed package collection in Texas was conducted on December 29, 2025.

These echo similar nationwide incidents first observed in 2020 and underscore the continued risk posed by unsolicited foreign seed shipments, including brushing scams. A brushing

scam occurs when sellers send unsolicited, low-value items to random people, who then post fake verified reviews to boost online sales. Due to the risk of introducing an invasive species or other concerns, these mystery seeds could pose a significant threat to agriculture and agricultural producers.

The Texas Department of Agriculture is working closely with federal partners to collect, test, and safely dispose of all unsolicited seed packages. These efforts are critical to protecting Texas farms, ranches, gardens, and natural ecosystems from invasive species and agricultural pests.

“Whether it’s part of an ongoing scam or something more sinister, we are determined to protect Texans,” said Commissioner Miller. “Unsolicited seeds coming into our country are a risk to American agriculture, our environment, and public safety. Texas isn’t going to take chances when it comes to protecting our people and our food supply.”

If you receive an unsolicited package, do not open its contents; instead, keep them sealed in their original packaging and contact the Texas Department of Agriculture immediately at 1-(800) TELL-TDA for guidance and safe collection.

From the 1-06-2026 Newsletter and Ivan Roman

READ THE
“TEXAS AGRICULTURE
Matters!”
NEWSLETTER

SPRING HOURS

Tuesday - Sunday
9:30-6:00



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TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOLUNTEER

Volunteers are needed to support events and activities. Help is needed to set up and break down our event location, sell plants and other garden items, give information to and sign up prospective new members, and teach children how to plant and maintain a garden.

Please contact Vallerie Hartfield at 210-240-1466.

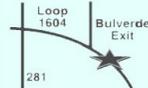
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Watch for our WEEKLY AD SPECIALS at www.milbergernursery.com

2026 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Below is your membership application for 2026. You can copy it, fill it out, and mail it in. We will have forms available at the next meetings for your convenience. If you cannot copy it, put all the info needed on paper and mail that in with your check. In all cases, PLEASE write legibly.

Men's Garden Club of San Antonio (MGCSA)

Open to men and women **2026 Membership Application**

CK# _____

Cash _____



Annual Membership	3-year Membership	Life Membership
\$20 Individual	\$30 Individual	\$200 Individual
\$25 Joint*	\$60 Joint*	\$250 Joint*

*Joint membership is one additional member residing in the same household. Both members may enjoy all the member benefits of the MGCSA, but only one receives the club newsletter, the Horti-Bull.

Please circle above the type of membership. Use one form for each membership or joint membership. Please print or write legibly.

Name _____ Spouse _____

Street Address _____

City _____ TX 78 _____ Occupation _____

Phone Number _____ E-Mail _____

Best way and time to connect _____

Today's Date _____ New Member

Sponsor _____ Renewal

Make checks payable to MGCSA; Address:

Paul Huegel, 15619 Cloud Top, SA, TX 78248



From bottom left: 1. Ken Wolfgram and Barbara Lamm at the Door Prize table, 2. Jeff Brown likes his door prize. 3. Marianne and Gary Ross are ready to use their Door Prize fertilizer. 4. SHARI Pfeiffer and Hubbie Charlie are in search of gardening knowledge. 5. Pat Schieffer didn't win a door prize, but she is still happy.



SOME PICTURES FROM THE FEBRUARY MEETING



THE NECTAR BAR - NATIVE PLANT NURSERY
 7600 Eckhert Rd., Suite #1 (210) 844-2381
 San Antonio, Texas 78240

A big "thank you" for all those who contributed to this month's newsletter