



# The Village Gazette

Volume 10, Issue 4  
Village Creek Community Association

April 2013

## WHY RUN FOR YOUR HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

*Make sure it is the right reason...*

When you consider the amount of time and work those that serve on boards put in you might wonder why they even want to run. Sometimes they really care about the community and they want to see the investment they have made (the largest most will ever make) increases and grows over time. But sometimes people who run for election on the community board want power or have an issue they deem so important they must pursue. The main issue that anyone who serves on a board of directors in an HOA must always consider is fairness and equality.

In July, there are two board position terms expiring and any resident homeowner of Village Creek can run for an expiring position. The incumbent member may run or relinquish their position making the election an open forum. Board members can be elected to consecutive terms until they either resign or a challenger wins the seat in an election.

The decisions you make when you serve on the Village Creek HOA are very important. The Board of Directors is required to oversee the budget of the community which can involve several hundred thousand dollars and needs directors that have a good understanding of financial budgets and how they work.

Directors also make decisions on violations and help guide what things can and can't be done on property within the association (deed restrictions of the community). Making the decision to be involved in your HOA is one that takes careful consideration with a clear understanding of why you want to serve and how you plan to make a difference. In the end you have to answer to all the residents of Village Creek and you want to make sure you have good intentions not only at the start of your term but also at the end of your service.

If you want to run for the board in July, please send your intentions to the editor of the newsletter and we will send you a packet to complete for the election held at the annual meeting in July. We will run bio's in the June and July newsletters for all challengers and incumbents to give residents a chance to get to know the candidates. The deadline to submit your bio for the June issue is May 5th.

Jerry Gabbert  
Editor, Village Creek Gazette  
jgabbert@gmail.com

# The Village Gazette

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## LANDSCAPE CORNER

### Landscape Committee Update

Since the Village Creek Landscape Committee was formed about a year ago, here are some of the things that have been proposed, implemented, and approved by the Board:

- Improved area from Spring Cypress to and including the Club House
- Improved lake area with new grass, new plants, and new shrubs
- Improved Lake Vista Drive with improved back entrance

Most of these improvements solved problems created by the drought and other issues over the years. Work to date has been focused on fixing problems most of us see. Future fixes will be to those streets less travelled. The Committee continues to work

*(Continued on Page 3)*

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# The Village Gazette

## Landscape Corner- (Continued from Page 2)

toward helping the VC Board keep Village Creek wonderful.

Hint: Remind young children that trees and shrubs in public areas are not mature enough for climbing.

### Tree Stakes

I once saw an 8' long 2" wooden tree stake still strapped to a 3' diameter 100 feet tall redwood tree. Gosh, I wish I had taken a picture of that. Here is a YouTube video of one way to remove those pesky stakes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBEi1g2gZYQ>

### Vegetables

Warm weather has arrived, so get those warm weather plants in the ground as soon as possible. Large tomatoes have a short season here, so plant them soon (last month would have been better). Consider cherry tomatoes too, as they tend to survive the summer heat well. Placing mulch around plants, such as tomatoes, will help keep the soil cool for a bit. Plant tomatoes deeply to provide better root growth. Remove leaves before burying that part of the stem.

This is the month to plant okra (which we enjoy, and it

is a star performer here) and sweet potatoes (which also grow really well and are tasty). Add some fertilizer for most plants.

### Perennials and Annual

Divide clumps and remove old growth now. Plant warm season perennials and annuals. Plant bulbs now. This is the time to plant annuals, though many of us prefer to stick with the less labor-intensive perennials. Plant some sunflower seeds now. Keep the seeds moist until they are well established. For the very large sunflowers, plant the seeds 12" apart rather than a few inches...as the seed package suggests. Plant a few extras in a pot in case some don't germinate, but most will.

### Trees, Shrubs, and Vines

Those trees, shrubs, and vines that have been dormant have awakened for their spring, summer, and fall show. Prune lightly if required. Oaks probably shouldn't be pruned this month because of the potential for disease transmission.

### Oaks and Fertilizer

Our oaks and other trees are beginning to mature. Though nice now, it is hard to imagine how beautiful our neighborhood

(Continued on Page 4)

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Sold Since 12/1/12	7	\$210,000	\$77.50	

Statistics are averages compiled from Houston Association of Realtors MLS. 3/5/13

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# The Village Gazette

## **Landscape Corner-** (Continued from Page 3)

will be as they become more majestic.

Doug Welsh's Texas Gardener (TG) suggests fertilizing trees with inexpensive pure nitrogen such as ammonium sulfate, bat guano, blood meal, or urea. Ammonium sulfate is the most available, but others apparently can be found at farm and ranch stores some nurseries. TG says that young trees and shrubs should be "spoon fed" by mixing one to two teaspoons of ammonium sulfate with one gallon of water and drenching the area around the drip line every 2 to 3 weeks. Brown tips indicate too much fertilizer. Mature trees should be fertilized with granular fertilizer in late winter, mid spring (if no growth is noted), and early summer. Spread 1 to 2 pounds of nitrogen for every 1,000 square feet of drip line. According to TG, studies have shown that surface fertilizer is, "...as effective as, and more efficient than, other methods (such as punching holes or deep-root feeding)." Water deeply after fertilizing: 1 inch of water to drive the nitrogen down to the roots.

Hint: Based on our own past experience, high nitrogen fertilizers such as these absolutely need to be watered in (one inch of water or rain) to prevent fertilizer burn of the grass above the tree roots.

Biblical Information from Texas Gardener: Thou shalt fertilize trees and shrubs in late winter before growth begins. Thou shalt not fertilize between August 1 and the first frost. Thou shouldst fertilize again after first frost.

### **Roses**

According to the Texas Gardener, April is the peak season for roses. When the rose flowers fade, do a light pruning (deadheading) to remove the old blooms. Add ¼ cup fertilizer to each plant soon after...to encourage new growth.

### **Lawns**

Healthy grass is your best defense against weeds. Apply lawn fertilizer after the second mowing. Consider using straight nitrogen lawn fertilizer now. This would be fertilizer such as 12-0-0 (I.e., with no phosphorus and potassium). Make sure you are getting sufficient water to those areas which tend to grow weeds rather than grass. If it doesn't rain, you will need to irrigate your lawn. A reminder: Strongly consider leaving your grass clippings on the lawn.

### **Mulch**

Keep 3 or 4 inches of mulch in all planted areas to keep the soil cool and to minimize water loss.

April's weather from intellicast.com for Tomball, Texas

	Average	Average	Record	Record	Average	Average
Month	Low Deg F	High Deg F	Low Deg F	High Deg F		Snow Inches
April	57	78	33 (1987)	59 (1963)	3.85	0

## **Interesting Product of the Month**

My daughter gave me a pair of Tidy-Trax shoe covers for Christmas. After walking in a muddy yard, you just step into these, and you can walk inside of the house with muddy shoes.... Alternately, you can put them on to go outside. This is a clever idea. Check out the video at this web site: <http://tidy-trax.com/>



*Until next time,*

# Happy Gardening!

*- The Village Creek Landscape Committee.*



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								1
	9	5						6
			6		2			
								7
	1	4	9					8
	4						9	
		1			7	2		3
6	7		3					

The goal is to fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9. Each digit may appear only once in each row, each column, and each 3x3 box.

View answers online at [www.peelinc.com](http://www.peelinc.com)

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# The Village Gazette

## Village Creek

# HOME HANDYMAN HINTS

## APRIL 2013

Gordon R. Watson

It is that time of year when our air conditioning (A/C) becomes an important part of our lives. For most of us, maintaining an A/C unit should be left to the professional. Because of the dangerous electrical voltages, natural gas issues, and moving parts in these systems, you should not attempt any work beyond that which you are knowledgeable, and you are safely able to perform. If there is any doubt, hire it done. Remember: Hospital visits are always less expensive than service calls.

Yearly service is certainly desirable, but you should read your unit's instruction manual for guidance in this regard. Our manual suggests that the outside unit be cleaned "...if it becomes dirty." A/C equipment manufacturers have no idea if its unit will be installed in the middle of a dusty desert or in the center of a peaceful Pacific island, so they have to be vague. The decision of how often to maintain a unit is basically left up to you and your trusted technician.

Our instruction book says, "Check your filter(s) at least once a month. When they are dirty, clean or replace them." Vague, again, huh? As noted, the manufacturer cannot predict how each A/C unit will be used, and every situation will be different. A very good example of this is that our upstairs A/C filter is the same size as the downstairs filter, but the upstairs filter gets far less dirty. The reasons are simple: We spend most of our time downstairs, and the downstairs unit runs more often and handles much more air. Filter longevity factors include the following: size of your family, pets, time away from house, number of guests, door openings, where you live, etc.). The type of filter also is an issue. Pleated filters generally last longer than flat filters (because they have much more surface area).

The moment you put a new filter in, your system becomes less

efficient because the air flow immediately is lowered by the resistance of the clean filter. You are paying to clean the air. As it clogs with dirt, the air flow continues to drop, so everything runs longer. This extra energy, of course, costs money.

### So, what happens if I don't replace my filters?

- Sometimes, the filter just gets so heavy it sags and fails itself. This failure would eventually clog the evaporator coil with dirt.
- But if the filter doesn't fail, if the heater is in use, the air flow will drop to the point where the furnace controls will sense an overheating issue, and the furnace will, hopefully, shut down until the furnace cools down. This on/off cycle may continue until something fails.
- If you don't change your filters and the air conditioning is in use, the air flow will drop to the point where the evaporator coil will freeze over, and there will be no air flow, no cooling, and no dehumidification. Eventually, there will be some serious and costly damage.

How does one know if a filter is dirty? Good question, and difficult to answer. Nothing teaches like experience.

- Hold a clean filter up to a bright light to see what a clean filter looks like. Then hold a dirty filter up to a bright light. If you can see the light through a filter, it may not be very dirty. If you cannot see light through it, consider replacing it. It is better to change them too often rather than less often.
- Look at the filter. If the filter is so heavy that it is sagging, it is beyond dirty.

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## Home Hints- (Continued from Page 7)

- Compare both sides of the filter to see the color difference between an old and new filter. Note that if the old filter's downstream side is getting much darker, it may be a hint that the filter's life is nearing completion.
- If the system doesn't seem to be working very well, checking the filters is a first step to solving the problem.

Never (see \* below) operate a system without filters. If you do, you will clog the evaporator coil with dirt. Clogged evaporator coils will cause an expensive cleaning job and system damage. If you don't have a filter change schedule and don't have a clue of what to do, one safe bet might be to look at the filters every month or so for a year, change the filters for sure at the beginning of the heating season and at the beginning of the cooling season. Then adjust this schedule as required until you and your air fan coil unit become mutually agreeable to your conclusion.

\*I can imagine a situation where an A/C unit has failed because of a clogged filter. If taking the filter out of the unit for eight hours will get you through the night, I would leave the filter out for eight hours. Sometimes life is not perfect.

There are many different residential filter types from 1" thick flat fiberglass to 4" thick pleated, highly efficient filters. Unless you have a very good reason that I am unaware of, I would avoid the 1" thick flat, non-pleated, and inexpensive filters. These do not provide much dust protection and are probably best for furnace-only industrial applications where a little dust won't hurt much. In general, pick a pleated filter that will fit in the unit. If your filters are loose in the A/C unit's filter frame, consider using cardboard or Masonite shims to take up the slack. Loose filters allow dirty air to bypass the filter...negating their purpose. If you have special filters for health or other reasons, continue using those special filters.

Some of us have a filter-life indicator on or near the thermostat, but that is usually just a timer... not really an accurate method of determining filter cleanliness. There are devices available which have the potential to advise you when to change your A/C filters. These measure the resistance across filters. As the filter clogs, the meter will show a rise in resistance. Frankly, you will still be involved in this decision as all the gauge knows is the filter's resistance. It doesn't know what the maximum resistance should be. You must make the final decision as to this maximum resistance, but once you have established this value, it will just be a matter of checking the meter on occasion. The industrial versions of these are somewhat expensive (inclined tube manometers or Magnehelic gauges), but there is a residential type (such as General Aire G99) available for under \$20 which might be worth trying...particularly if your filters are of the high-cost, high efficiency variety. I have had no experience with this device, so you may want to check some reviews on the net.

Hint: Keep a paper and pen near your filter access to write the date of the last filter replacement. This sort of a log will allow you to begin understanding how often to replace filters.

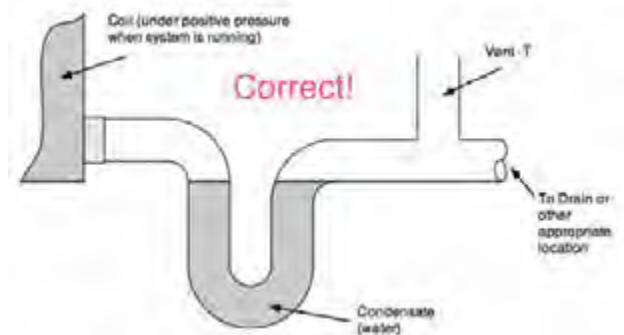
Another hint: Filters generally have an arrow on them to indicate air flow direction.

## Evaporator Drain

Every air conditioning (cooling) unit must have a condensate drain. In Village Creek homes, this will normally be in the attic. It often consists of a 3/4" white PVC pipe (commonly insulated to prevent exterior condensation). Because the coil operates at a low temperature, water will condense on the coil, drip to the coil drain pan, flow through the pipe in the attic, and the pipe will drop down inside of a wall to the \*sanitary sewer system...commonly into the drain pipe below one of the bathroom sinks. You may not ever see or hear this water or even know where the connection is (unless something goes wrong).

\*Note that many cities PROHIBIT sending A/C condensate to the sanitary sewer because it is pure water that really doesn't need expensive sewer plant processing.

Condensate drains should have a "U" trap and a vent/chemical access point. This drawing shows what should be there:



In many homes, the "U" trap is inadvertently left out, but the trap actually serves two useful purposes: It prevents sewer gases from travelling backwards into the air handler when the fan is off, and it prevents cooled and heated air from leaving the vent when the fan is on.

## Suggestions:

- Do not cap the vent if it is on the downstream side of a "U" trap. It needs to "breathe" to prevent the trap from syphoning away. Obviously, sewer gases will escape into the attic, but will generally not be an issue.
- On the other hand, note that if you don't have a "U" trap, you should cap the vent as you will just lose heat and cooling to the attic without the cap.
- If you have a "U" trap, but the vent is on the wrong (upstream) side of the trap, you should cap this vent to prevent cold air from being lost to the attic.
- Where a cap is used, it must be removable (not glued) to allow chemicals to be poured in.
- If you do not have a vent (chemical access point) to add bleach, and have no way to add bleach, you should add one.

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## Home Hints- (Continued from Page 8)

Assuming you know how to safely add bleach, you should turn off the power to the A/C unit and pour into the vent a half a cup of bleach (or other anti-biological growth agent). You should NOT pour a liquid into a vent if the power is on because the airflow outwards might blast the bleach into your eyes. Keep in mind that the thermostat may turn the unit on at the very moment you start pouring the bleach, so turn the power off before you start.

If you don't add bleach at least year or so, it is likely that, within five to ten years (based on actual experience), the drain between the unit and the sink drain will accumulate sufficient biological growth to clog the pipe. This pipe will fill up...causing, at minimum, an overflow into the drain pan in the attic. It is possible that overflow will damage floors or sheetrock. Take a funnel, eye-protection, and container to the attic with you.

If you want to add a "U" trap, buy a device at your hardware store used for this purpose. Ask for air condensate traps. They are in the PVC fitting section and will look like this:



You could make this out of ¾ inch pvc pipe and elbows, but don't do this as the manufactured types are far less prone to clogging because of their streamlined shape. By the way, if you don't have a trap, and things seem to work well, I wouldn't worry much about it. But do insist on one when you change to a new A/C unit.

While you are near your A/C unit, check the duct connections in the vicinity to make sure they are not leaking cold or hot air. If they are, seal them with a good aluminum tape (sticky side is covered with a protective paper). Never use "duct" tape as it doesn't age well, and most codes now prohibit using duct tape on ducts (one of life's ironies). Keep flammables away from the flue.

### Cleaning of the Condensing Unit

This part of the work must be done by a technician. The condensing unit is the equipment located outside of the home. It has a coil around it which should be cleaned according to your instruction manual and certainly if it appears dirty. Every technician has his own method, but it appears common that the condensing coil is sprayed with a water hose. A special and environmentally friendly cleaning chemical may be used as well. It is VITAL that the 220 volt electricity be turned off at the breaker panel before this cleaning is done. Note that in some units, tree leaves and dirt accumulate at the base below

(Continued on Page 9)

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## Home Hints- (Continued from Page 9)

the coils. This debris is tough to get out, but it is important that it be removed because it might eventually cause corrosion of either the coil or the cabinet. Don't poke at the fins and coils with anything sharp as the tubing is fragile and a hole poked the refrigerant tubes will be VERY expensive to fix. Never use a power washer on these coils because the fins are very fragile.

### Checking the Electrical

A qualified service technician should check the A/C unit's electrical panel in the outside condensing unit according to your manual, but (at minimum), it should be checked every five or so years or when the unit has failed. Servicing 220/110 Volt electrical systems such as this is NOT for the amateur. The technician will shut off the power to the panel prior to this work, and he will check to make sure the power is off with a special tool which the amateur will not have. He will confirm the electrical connections are tight, clean out the area, inspect the electrical components, and seal any significant varmint entry points.

A couple of more points: The point where the A/C hoses and power into your house needs to be sealed...possibly with a foam sealant. This could be a point of entry for mice. Also, at some point the foam insulation around the cold A/C line should be replaced. Sunlight and ozone badly damage these.

Until next time, keep in mind that maintenance is almost always less expensive than repairs caused by lack of maintenance. Keep within your handyman comfort-zone, stay comfortable, and stay dry, and be safe.

## REMINDER

Please do not put your trash on the curb before 6 pm the night before trash pick-up. Thank you for helping to keep our neighborhood beautiful and clean.

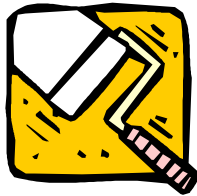
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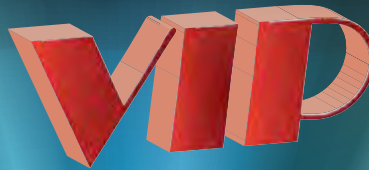
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## Welcome to a Seller's Market!

Houston single-family home sales in January increased a whopping 28% in comparison to last year. Inventory is 25% below what was found this time last year and average days on the market are down 15% from last year.

It's a seller's market and now that listings are low, sales are high and median sales prices are up. Call or email me today for a free, no obligation Competitive Market Analysis to find out what your house is worth! **2013 may be your year to make a move.**



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