



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume II, Issue 12

Official E-letter of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association, Waxahachie, Texas

January, 2009

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month by month agenda of what you should be doing to your landscape. We will be featuring horticulture articles that we hope you will find interesting, important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website www.ECMGA.com, click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE!

Melinda Kocian, editor



Last Call - Master Gardener Training

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association has announced that applications are now available for the 2009 Master Gardener training program. Texas Master Gardeners are trained members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens.



The time commitment is from 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday during February. Additionally, trainees will be asked to complete 75 hours of volunteer service before graduating from the Master Gardener program. Application forms are available on the Ellis County Master Gardener's Website at www.ecmga.com or by calling 972-825-5175. Tuition for the program is \$100.

Class size is limited and attendance is required at all sessions to complete the program. Deadline for application is **January 9**, but classes fill quickly and applications are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Listen to KBEC.....

Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. on 1390 AM.

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian

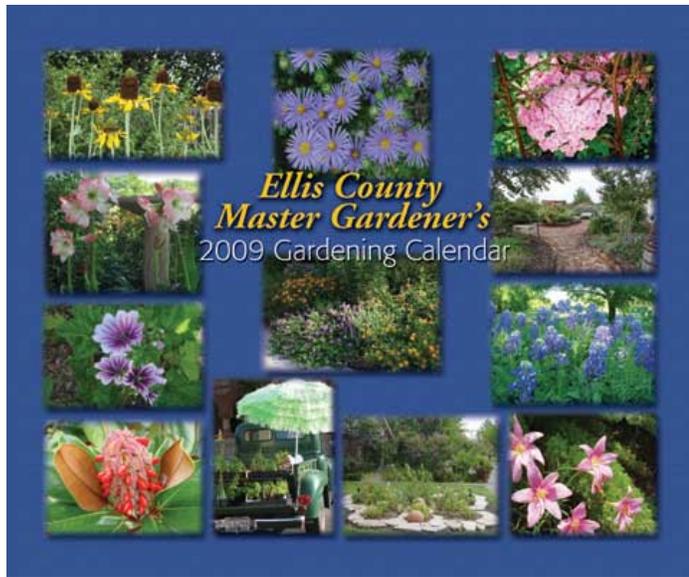
Mark Your Calendars!

The 2009 Ellis County Master Gardener's EXPO is set for Saturday, March 28th at the Waxahachie Civic Center.

Anyone wishing to become a sponsor or an exhibitor of the 2009 Expo, can find additional information on our website: www.ECMGA.com or contact James Kocian: 972-814-0699, or expo.ecmga@yahoo.com.

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The 2009 Gardening Calendars are Here!

The much awaited, 3rd annual, Ellis County Master Gardener gardening calendar is here and it'sFREE..... from the following sponsors. Without them it could not have happened. Please visit one of them to pick up your calendar, while supplies last; they go **FAST!**

Animal Hospital of Ovilla
 ARK Country Store
 Boyce Feed & Grain
 Cancun/Acapulco
 CNB of Texas
 Cottage Garden Designs
 The Dove's Nest
 Garden Inspirations
 Gingerbread Press

Jeanette's Embroidery
 Loma Linda Events
 Midlothian Feed
 Natural Water Works
 Natural Stone Works
 Organics Lawn & Garden Store
 Pam Daniel, Ebby Halliday
 Pampered Chef, Barbara Brasfield
 Patio Scapes

Pedal Pushers
 Rainwater Harvesting Solutions
 Stone River Landscaping
 Tex-Scape Greenery
 The Greenery
 Travis Equipment
 Urban Farmers
 Waxahachie Daily Light
 Yuko Mauldin, GMAC Realtors



A Lasagna Garden

By Jamey Cosper-Guarascio, Ellis County Master Gardener

Something about a new year makes us dream big and set impossible goals. We design huge flowerbeds with exotic blooms in all the latest colors, envision success with plants we've struggled with in the past, and ... oh, how about a new water feature?

This year, I'm taking a cue from nature and following a simpler path. Instead of hours spent fighting nature to create MY vision, I'm planning to realign my idea of perfection.

I've been fighting that climbing vine for several summers now - this year, I'm painting an old chair lavender, setting it up in the middle of the vines, and calling it a fairy garden. That area the kids keep asking to plant? I'm handing them a shovel and a package of marigold seeds and letting them go wild. The area that produces rock with far more success than any other plant I've tried? I think I'll save my back - and my tiller - and plant a lasagna garden there.

Haven't heard of lasagna gardening? Lasagna gardening is an awesome method for producing great crops in less than desirable areas. Lasagna gardening can be done in individual pots or across acres. The best part, in my opinion, is that it utilizes yard waste in a very productive fashion. The materials are pretty easy to come by - things you generally have in abundance already: newspaper, compost, grass clippings, chopped leaves, peat moss, coffee grounds, vegetable peels, etc.

So while I wait for Spring to arrive, I'll start collecting the makings for my next fantastic garden. This year, my gardens will be better than ever, but this year, I'll garden smart.

It's January - What Needs to be Done?



Giant Coneflower, *Rudbeckia Maxima*
From the garden of Homer McCain

EarthKind™ Tips for January

Soil analysis is the foundation of a successful garden. Your analysis will allow for proper irrigation, fertilization, plant selection, and integrated pest management. For more information visit: <http://urbanlandscapeguide.tamu.edu/>.

Planting and Sowing

- January is the perfect time to transplant mature or established trees and shrubs while they are dormant.
- Sow seeds for warm-season annuals (cosmos, marigolds, petunias, salvias, zinnias, and impatiens) in flats early this month to get a jump on plant growth before hot weather arrives. Start tomatoes and peppers from seed mid-month.
- Sow snap peas and set onions directly into your garden late this month.
- Plant the tulip and hyacinth bulbs that you have been chilling by the first week this month.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Apply liquid root-stimulator monthly to newly planted trees or shrubs. Any fertility program using regular fertilizer should begin in late fall of the first growing season.
- Prune dead and damaged limbs from shade trees and odd branches from evergreen shrubs to maintain their natural form.
- Peach trees and plum trees should be pruned to maintain their "bowl" shape and to remove water sprouts.
- Maintain your tree-form crape myrtle by removing the "root sprouts" growing from the base.

This and That

- Select and order gladiolus corms for February/March planting.
- Have your soil tested now before the rush of spring. Contact an Ellis County Master Gardener or your County AgriLife Office for the necessary collection and mailing supplies, or for more information.
- Repair and/or tune up your lawn mower and other power equipment.
- Make plans for flower and vegetable gardens now, before the spring rush. Time spent paging through garden catalogs will pay off in improved plant selections.

Gardening in Very Small Places

By Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener

Many Texans have plenty of yard space to devote to in-ground vegetable and herb gardens, and with our Texas climate may grow two or even more gardens per year, adapting plants to the particular season. Others long for such gardens, but have very small sites. Persons with physical challenges may find the work of planting and maintaining an in-ground garden to be too challenging. Some people may not want the investment of time and money required to establish a large garden, but still long for the taste of fresh picked tomatoes and salad greens. Apartment dwellers may have no plot to call their own. There is an answer for all these people, indeed, for anyone who feel the "pull of the soil." That answer is simple and easy; container gardening.

How simple? How easy? Fill a container with potting mix and plant it. A window sill, a balcony, a patio, a deck, a door step; all can provide sufficient space to grow vegetables, herbs, even fruit and nut trees. Almost any kind of plant can be grown in a container.

There are advantages to container gardening other than space for the garden or the health of the gardener. Problems with soil-borne diseases, nematodes, or poor soil can be avoided by growing your garden in containers. Planting a flower pot with vegetable seeds takes very little time, and the plants will fill the pot quickly. Best of all, your garden is portable. You can move all or part of it anywhere you like. A boring deck or patio can be brightened by a pot of tomatoes. A container of herbs can provide wonderful aroma and be handy for snipping on a bright kitchen window sill. A vine-covered trellis in a planter box can provide shade if no trees are available.

The choice of container is almost limitless. One caveat is useful here: make sure your container has never held anything toxic to animals, people, or plants. Barrels, cutoff milk or bleach jugs, Styrofoam coolers, cinder blocks, even pieces of drainage pipe may



What's Happening in January

Cedar Ridge Preserve (CPR) - At an elevation of 755 feet, Cedar Ridge Preserve (formerly the Dallas Nature Center) is a slice of the hill country just 20 minutes outside Dallas. Located at 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas, Texas 75249, Cedar Ridge Preserve is a not-for-profit natural habitat of 633 acres featuring:

CRP has been managed by Audubon Dallas since April 2003 by charter from the Dallas County Park & Open Space Program and the City of Dallas. In addition to the general rules and regulations, please be aware that wheeled vehicles of ALL types are prohibited on the trails, including bicycles.

- 10 miles of hiking trails
- Native junipers, grasses, wildflowers
- Butterfly gardens
- Picnic areas.
- Wild animals, birds, insects and reptiles

Preserve Hours

Nov. 1 – Mar. 31

30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Apr. 1 – Oct. 31

6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Closed Mondays

972-709-7784

Saturday, January 17, 2009 @ 8:00 AM, Winter Bird Walk

Description: Master Naturalist and long-time Cedar Ridge Preserve volunteer Jim Varnum leads a walk through forest and field to look for winter birds. Expect to see sparrows, kinglets, chickadees, wrens, maybe a hawk or two, etc. **Field Trip Details:** Walk will start at 8:00 AM and will last approximately 2 hours. Bring your binoculars and bird books. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support. More info? Jim Varnum jevarnum@aol.com , 214-543-2055. Please RSVP if you are bringing a group.

Saturday, January 17, 2009 @ 11:00 AM, Winter Nature Walk

Description: Master Naturalist and long-time CRP volunteer Jim Varnum leads a walk through forest and field to look at wintry things. Here's an opportunity to get out of the house for a couple of hours to observe winter birds, winter color (leaves and berries), and maybe even some butterflies. Fun for adults and children. **Field Trip Details:** Walk will start at 11:00 AM and will last approximately 1.5 hours. Bring your binoculars and camera. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support. More info? Jim Varnum jevarnum@aol.com or 214-543-2055. Please RSVP if you are bringing a group.

Sunday, February 22, 2009 @ 1:00 PM, Geoffrey B. Stanford Trout Lily Walk #1

Description: Trout lilies, or white dog-toothed violets, are the harbingers of spring in the plant world. These flowers in the lily family bloom from just mid-February to mid-March. And there are many interesting facts about trout lilies. Did you know trout lily bulbs produce just one leaf in the first 6 years, then 2 leaves, a scape (stem) and a flower in the 7th year? **Walk Details:** Master Naturalist and long-time CRP volunteer Jim Varnum will conduct a short walk to observe trout lilies. The walk will start at 2:00 PM and will last approximately 1 hour. Bring your camera. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support. Join Jim for a nature walk afterwards. **More Info?** Jim Varnum jevarnum@aol.com or 214-543-2055. RSVP is not needed.

Saturday, March 7, 2009 @ 10:00 AM, Geoffrey B. Stanford Trout Lily Walk #2

Description: Trout lilies, or white dog-toothed violets, are the harbingers of spring in the plant world. These flowers in the lily family bloom from just mid-February to mid-March. And there are many interesting facts about trout lilies. Did you know trout lily bulbs produce just one leaf in the first 6 years, then 2 leaves, a scape (stem) and a flower in the 7th year? **Walk Details:** Master Naturalist and long-time CRP volunteer Jim Varnum will conduct a short walk to observe trout lilies. The walk will start at 10:00 AM and will last approximately 1 hour. Bring your camera. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support. Join Jim for a nature walk afterwards. **More Info?** Jim Varnum jevarnum@aol.com or 214-543-2055. RSVP is not needed.

Saturday, January 17th - Water Conservation/Rainwater Harvesting, presented by Pam Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener. Please see pertinent information in article on page 8.

Friday-Saturday, March 20-21, Texas Rainwater Catchment Association (TRAC), 1st Annual State Conference. Please read article written by Rick Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener, on page 7.

(Continued from page 3)

be used. I once grew a lovely 3-level garden in sections of clay drainage pipe. Most of us have seen old chair seats devoted to a patch of flowers. Once, on an Iowa farm, I saw a discarded bathroom set (toilet, tub, and lavatory) planted with flowers. These fixtures provided space for plants certainly, but the taste of the homeowner was highly suspect to passersby.

Whatever type of container you decide to use, it must meet some basic requirements: it must have drainage holes, adequate light, water and appropriate soil. Regular potting soil from garden centers may be a good growing medium. Avoid the soilless mixtures because they do not offer adequate support for plant roots, and they are sterile and offer few nutrients. Adding even large amounts of fertilizer doesn't help in a soilless medium. You can make your own growing medium by mixing one part peat moss, vermiculite or perlite; one part clean, coarse (builder's) sand, and a slow release fertilizer (14-14-14) according to container size.

Available sunlight will determine which plants you can grow. Generally speaking, root crops and leaf crops can tolerate partial shade while vegetables grown for their fruits need at least six and preferably eight hours of sunlight per day.

Plant your container gardens at the same time you would plant an in-ground garden. Follow package directions when planting seeds; if transplanting, plant wet to wet. That is, soak the little pot in water before planting in the wet soil of the big pot.

Don't forget to water and fertilize your plants. Container grown plants (especially those grown in clay pots) will require watering frequently, probably more than once a day. If the soil mix you have chosen contains fertilizer, you probably won't need to fertilize until six or eight weeks have passed. Then add a water-soluble fertilizer at the recommended rate.

The following are a few types of vegetables that may be grown in containers (check with seed catalogues for varieties adapted to container culture):

1. Leaf lettuces (partial shade) 1/2 gal. container (Mesclun does VERY well)
2. Eggplant (full sun) 5 gal. per plant—I have grown eggplant as a decoration at my front door; very attractive.
3. Peppers, both hot and sweet (full sun, hot weather) 2 gal. per plant.
4. Cherry tomatoes (full sun) 1 gal. per plant.
5. Onions (full sun but will tolerate some shade) 1/2 gal.. Needs lots of moisture.
6. Parsley, chives, sage, basil are only a few of the herbs that can be grown very successfully in pots. Some herbs do better as transplants.

If you place your containers outside on a pavement, shield them from the reflected sun during the hottest part of the day. Protect them from severe storms.

Some information for this article was taken from the Texas Master Gardener Program offered by Texas AgriLife Extension of the Texas A&M University System and from Samuel D. Cotner, Ph.D.

ALL THOSE LEFT OVER CHRISTMAS PLANTS

By Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener

Did you get some lovely Christmas flowers and are now wondering what to do with them? They can have a long life with a little TLC. Mine have been known to usher in Easter in full bloom and then present a problem as the weather warms and I try to figure out what to do with them when I want something else on that table!!

That traditional Poinsettia is really a hardy tropical native that grows wild in the bright, warm areas of Mexico and Hawaii. It likes to be relatively dry and out of the direct sun. Mine always seem to respond to a cup of cold coffee weekly. I have to be careful not to over-water because I do tend to have several cups of leftover coffee a week. When the seasons change and call for the bulbs and spring like plants, the Poinsettias can make it outside in the ground in the dappled light behind or under a shrub. They can turn into a shrub themselves if the conditions are right. They usually hold their blooms awhile, but won't bloom again, but the foliage is pretty and green.

The Christmas cactus can be a joy all year round. Like its name, it really likes to be dry. I use the tried and true method of watering only when it starts to droop and then soaking it completely. Mine have been known to bloom every year (only not at Christmas because their blooms are tied to a specific number of daylight hours and I'm not doing the "put them in the closet routine"!!) They benefit greatly from the long soak in ½ strength liquid fertilizer and being root bound. I don't think about repotting mine until I see the roots crawling out the bottom. They can, with a little TLC and neglect, live a long time. Unlike the Poinsettia, which bites the bullet every year, the Christmas cactus can survive and even thrive inside for many years. My first one was a start from a friend's in Wyoming that was in turn a start from her Mother's some 20 years ago before I got mine.

Now's the time, as you get the tree put away and ornaments safely stored, to give a little thought to the new year. Do you want to check into the Master Gardener training coming up in February? Now is the time to sign up. Call The AgriLife office at 972-825-5175 for an application. Did you get the tools you wanted in your stocking? Think about what you want your yard to look like next spring. It's never too early to plan!



Blue Oat Grass

Helictotrichon sempervirens

At first glance, one might think they were looking at a clump of the more commonly-grown *Festuca ovina* or blue fescue. But *Helictotrichon* is a little bigger than blue fescue, reaching a mature height of two feet, and forming a clump up to three feet across. The graceful seed heads grow vertically from the center, appearing in mid-summer.

This hardy, evergreen grass is hardy to zone 3 or 4 and is drought-tolerant. Native to central and southwestern Europe, it boasts year-round beautiful, blue-gray feathery foliage, requiring only good drainage and full sun to look stunning season after season. Blue oat grass won the Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1993, and deserves to be more widely used in landscape plans.

Type of plant:	Ornamental Grasses and Bamboo	Cold hardiness:	Zone 4a to Zone 9b
Bloom color:	Cream/Tan	Height:	12-18 in.
Bloom time of year:	Late Spring/Early Summer	Spacing:	12-15 in.
Sun requirements:	Full Sun		

Tomato 'Brandywine' (Sudduth Strain)

Lycopersicon lycopersicum

Probably the most well-known heirloom tomato is 'Brandywine'. These are large, meaty tomatoes, and the fruit can weigh up to a pound. A single slice will nicely cover a slice of sandwich bread or a hamburger. Don't expect to find 'Brandywine' in the grocery store, but you might luck out at your local farmers' markets.

The origins of 'Brandywine' are a little murky, but it has enjoyed more than 15 minutes of fame since it came to light in a Seed Savers Exchange catalog in the early 80s. Compared to hybrids, 'Brandywine' has decidedly "real tomato" flavor and texture, although hardcore tomato growers will quickly rattle off a dozen varieties they prefer to this one. But the casual gardener or the new heirloom grower could certainly do worse than grow 'Brandywine' at least once.

Sun requirements:	Full Sun
Height:	4-6 ft.
Spacing:	24-36 in.



Now would be a great time, while you are going through your seed catalogues, to buy a packet of seeds and try them out!
(M.K., editor)

The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.
~Dorothy Frances Gurney, "Garden Thoughts"

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Delphinium carolinianum Walt.
Buttercup Family (Ranunculaceae)

Larkspur

Larkspur is easily distinguished by the "spur" that extends back from the base of the upper sepal, presumably the lark's spur. The other four sepals have the usual petal form. Larkspur's color can range from white through all shades of blue to blue-violet. Flowers, few to several, open upward along the solitary stem, forming an inflorescence several inches long. The annual larkspur of gardens, *D. ajacis*, has escaped cultivation and is often found growing wild, but is not a native wildflower. Leaves of larkspur are alternate, deeply palmate-lobed, and one to two inches wide. A tincture of larkspur was an old-fashioned but reliable standby to kill body lice, but can cause a rash. This is not surprising; all parts of the plant are poisonous.

Zone: 1-10
Size: 1-3 feet
Blooms: April-June, Perennial

Texas Rainwater Catchment Association (TRCA) 2009 State Conference and Rainwater Catchment Survey

By Rick Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener
TRCA Board of Directors/Webmaster



The Texas Rainwater Catchment Association (TRCA) is pleased to announce that we are holding our first annual State Conference in Kerrville, Texas on March 20th and 21st of 2009. The mission of TRCA is as follows: The mission of the Texas Rainwater Catchment Association is to provide Texas citizens with credible information and resources on rainwater collection, to promote the advancement of rainwater conservation and to work with state, county and other local government units in promoting rainwater catchment. The agenda of this conference has been put together with that mission in mind. The agenda for Friday the 20th is targeted towards the rainwater professional, while the agenda for Saturday is targeted towards the general public. All are welcome to attend either day. There will also be tours on both dates to visit rainwater catchment systems installed in Boerne and Kerrville.

We hope that all you Master Gardener's and Master Naturalist who have attended "Rainwater Specialist" training, as well as all others who have an interest in rainwater catchment will attend. Come and support our new organization and help to ensure our success!

We are currently conducting a survey to try and gain a better understanding of current rainwater catchment usage in the state of Texas. We are looking for all rainwater catchment installations in Texas, from users and installers, as well as all demonstration sites installed throughout Texas. This information will be used to help us determine how big an impact rainwater catchment is making in reducing our demand on other water resources, reduction of storm water, and its worth in jobs created and products used. This will help us as an industry and state association when addressing the importance rainwater capture is having in our state and help us when addressing regulatory and governmental issues, at the local and state levels.

For more information, agenda, registration and TRCA membership application, please visit our website, www.texrca.org. You will find tabs on the left side of the page for the State Conference and for the Survey!



Trinity River Audubon Center

By Pam Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener

At 6,000 acres, the Great Trinity Forest is the largest urban hardwood forest in the United States. The Great Trinity Forest supports a diverse community of plant and animal species and contains a unique mixture of bottomland hardwoods, aquatic and wetland systems and grasslands. Once visitors arrive, they will explore hands-on exhibits; miles of nature viewing trails; the Children's Discovery Garden; and sustainable building features including a vegetated roof, rainwater collection system, "living machine" wastewater treatment plant, energy efficient systems, and recycled materials. The Trinity River Audubon Center will be the first LEED-certified building constructed by the City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department.

LIVING GREEN

This class meets the third Saturday of each month. Would you like to learn more about sustainability and how green practices can save natural resources and money? Join us for information and demonstrations on green practices at home, in the yard, and office. We'll discuss tips for waste reduction, recycling and reuse, water conservation, green office practices, organic gardening and Xeriscaping, native plants, composting, carbon foot print and more. Each class will include demonstrations and discussion.

Fee: \$20/class or \$70/four class series

On January 17th Pam Daniel will present a Water Conservation/Rainwater Harvesting program as a part of the Living Green Educational Series.

To sign up call 214-398-TRAC.

Location

6500 South Loop 12

Dallas, TX 75217

For more information call 214-398-TRAC

Longitude and latitude coordinates: 32.712636, -96.70879



It's January - What Else Needs to be Done?

By Rosemary Morgeson
Ellis County Master Gardener



Now is a great time to move trees and shrubs in your landscape! It's also a great time for removing any erratic growth on your evergreen trees and shrubs, but save your major reshaping for late winter. Prune your peach and plum trees now. Prune so that you can maintain a good horizontal habit and strong scaffold branching.

Now that all the leaves have fallen, you should be able to see the mistletoe! Remove the mistletoe from the limbs. Severe infestations may require removal of the entire branch.

Take advantage of any opportunity to prepare your beds now so that you aren't delayed at planting time. Roto till garden plots every 6 weeks over the winter to incorporate autumn's fallen leaves, rotted compost and other organic matter. Keep turning your compost piles. Turning once a week helps to make compost quicker. Apply lawn-type fertilizer to compost, one cup per cubic yard. Mix the fertilizer into the organic matter and water regularly.

Plant winter-berrying plants like various hollies, pyracanthas and nandinas. Your pansies and other winter color annuals still need a complete and balanced fertilizer each time that you water them.

Been thinking about a vegetable garden? Vegetable gardening is growing in popularity and nothing tastes better than something that you have grown yourself! So let's get started now! January is the start of spring gardening season. You can get the beds ready by mixing in compost and then covering the soil with mulch of leaves or spent hay. This will protect the soil surface and deter weeds from germinating. You can get your asparagus crowns as well as onion transplants set. Water new transplants with a diluted fertilizer solution; this will help get the new plants off to a good and fast start.

Beat the spring rush and get those dull garden tools sharpened and your lawn equipment serviced now!

Watering still plays an important part to your gardening during the winter months. Check the soils around your shrubs and trees for moisture and don't forget about your grasses! Water as needed to keep the roots from drying out. Remember that water acts as an insulator to your landscape during the winter months.

Prune your *Rose of Sharon* and other summer-flowering shrubs and vines at this time. Trim lightly or the plants will produce excessive vegetative growth.

Be sure to keep your Christmas cacti, cyclamen and azaleas away from hot drafts. Keep them moist at all times to prolong their flowering times indoors. Wondering what to do with those Christmas blooming amaryllis? Then take it out about February and plant in a well drained rich organic soil mixture. It will bloom again next spring. Be sure that it receives at least 6 hours of full sun.

Contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners with your gardening questions at 972-825-5175 or visit us on the web at www.ecmga.com.