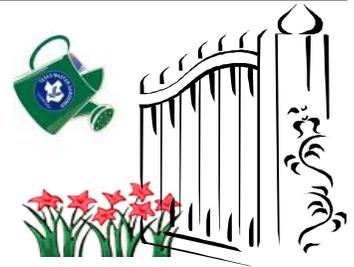




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume III, Issue 2

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

March, 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](http://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



**It's Finally Here....!**

## The Ellis County Master Gardener's 9th Annual Lawn and Garden Expo

Saturday, March 28th ♦ Waxahachie Civic Center  
9 am. - 5 p.m.



### It's for Everyone!

This year's event is a multi-national extravaganza...In other words, it's going to be a **REALLY BIG SHOW!** Something for **ALL** family members.

#### Keynote Speaker

**Neil Sperry**, 2 p.m., The popular horticulture author and garden-talk-show personality presents "*Color in Your Landscape*"

#### Adult Workshops

**Diane Hopkins**, 10 a.m., "**Bees and Their Use as Pollinators**", Diane will focus on the effectiveness of bees as pollinators and suggest proven techniques to attract them to your garden.

**Nancy Prikryl**, 11 a.m., "**Butterfly Gardening**". Master Gardener and Master Naturalist, Nancy will share her knowledge and enthusiasm for attracting butterflies on their favorite plants.

**Sandra Jones**, 12 noon. Master Gardener. Sandra will enlighten the community of the significance of being a **Master Naturalist**.

**Pam Daniel**, 1 p.m. **Rainwater Harvesting**. Master Gardener; Pam's presentation explains how the catchment of rain water will significantly decrease our use of city water and grow healthier plants.

**Robert Shugart**, 4 p.m. Master Gardener, will share his expertise regarding **Vegetable Gardening and Drip Irrigation**.

### Master Gardener Plant Sales

**9 a.m. - 5 p.m.** Another very popular Expo feature; a cooperative agreement with the Waxahachie High School to use their greenhouse has permitted Master Gardeners to have more plants to sell this year than ever before. To coincide with the Adult Workshop topics, the sale will feature butterfly-attracting plants, natives, tomatoes and hard to find plants.

### Master Gardener Information Area

Head for this area if you have a troubling lawn and gardening questions. Master Gardeners will be available all day to discuss your lawn and garden concerns and provide free reference materials pertinent to many common questions.

### The Children's Gardening Workshops

Allow the children to experience the joys of hands-on garden-related activities. This will be our 3rd year for the children's workshops. Activities are designed to address diverse learning styles and interests. The workshops will operate from 10:00 to 12 noon. And reopen from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. **Children must be accompanied by a parent.**

### Out New Master Gardener Cookbook is Here!

On sale at the Master Gardener Sales Table  
**\$10.00**

### 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

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## Thank You to our Expo Sponsors!

**Visit these sponsors for your complimentary Expo tickets**



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Ennis Garden Club

### What's Happening in March

**Saturday, March 7 @ 10:30**, Petal Pushers - Antique Rose Day. Presented by Vicki Thaxton.

**Saturday and Sunday, March 7 & 8, @ Weston Gardens**, 8101 Anglin Dr., Ft. Worth, 817-572-0549, [www.westongardens.com](http://www.westongardens.com).

**1:30 p.m.** Spring Vegetable Gardening in North Texas; "More Than Just Tomatoes & Peppers".

**3:00 p.m.** "Grow Your Own Fruit and Nuts"

**Thursday, March 12, 7:00 p.m.** @ The Greenery. Green Thumb Organic Club- "*Feed the Earth and the Earth will Feed You*". Peggy Sheets and Marilyn Simmons. Marilyn will cover organic products and procedures and vegetable garden tips. Peggy will share her best tips on the heirloom varieties and how to raise them. Everyone is welcome!

**Saturday, March 14, 9:30** - Val talks on Organic Vegetable Gardening; hands on experience!.

**Saturday, March 14, 9:00 am to Noon**, Pettigrew Academy hosts the Dallas Zoo Nature Exchange at the Settles Science and Nature Center at 806 E. Marvin in Waxahachie. Free children's events of various skulls collected for many years by Mr. & Mrs. VanZandt. Free food, games and crafts. 972-923-1633.

**Monday, March 16, 7:00 p.m.** - **Garden Inspirations**: Speaker Robert Shugart, Ellis County Master Gardener, on Drip Irrigation. Also Chef Jeri Maginty will be preparing a dish with English Peas. Jeri trained at a farm-to-fork ranch in California. For more info and directions call 214-497-3918.

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### Lighthouse for Learning

with the Ellis County Master Gardeners

For reservations call 972-923-4631, Extension 142

**Monday, March 2, 6:00-7:30** - *Vegetable Gardening*, **Instructor: Robert Shugart**. \$10.00. Power Point presentation and discussion on preparing your garden site, selecting what to plant in your area with special emphasis on tomatoes.

**Monday, March 9, 6:00-7:30** - *Azaleas*, **Instructor: Sandra Jones**, \$10.00

Learn the easy way to have azaleas in your flower beds. You will learn how to grow these easy plants and enjoy the blooms of early spring and again in the fall. They are much easier to grow than you think!

**Monday, March 30, 6:00-7:30** - *Plant Propagation*, **Instructor: Walt Friis**, \$10.00.

Students will learn the basics of Plant Propagation, increasing and multiplying plants for the house, landscape and garden. After a short presentation in the classroom, students will have hands-on experience in the WISD High School greenhouse.

**Monday, April 6, 6:00-7:30** - *Greenhouse Management*, **Instructor: Walt Friis**, \$10.00.

Considering buying or building your own hobby greenhouse? Learn the basics of greenhouse management, starting with choice of site, design, heating, cooling, lighting and watering needs.

(Continued on page 9)

**Speakers for the  
9th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo**

**Bees and Their Use as Pollinators**

Presented by Diane Hopkins

10:00 a.m. in the Crape Myrtle Room



Diane is an Ellis County Master Gardener. Through training and volunteer service, she achieved the designation of Entomology Specialist with the Texas Master Gardener Association in 2008. Her interest in bees began in 1986 as a hobbyist beekeeper. Her interest has expanded to educating others to the importance of bees in a healthy environment. She has presented programs on bees and beekeeping in both Travis and Ellis Counties.

Her presentation will focus on the effectiveness of bees as pollinators and suggest proven techniques to attract them to your garden.

**Butterfly Gardening**

Presented by Nancy Prikryl

11:00 a.m. - The Crape Myrtle Room



Nancy has been an Ellis County Master Gardener since 2005, specializing in vegetable gardening, composting, native plants and butterfly gardens. She acquired her love of gardening from her grandfather who allowed her to help in his extensive garden when she was only 5 years old. Her love of the out-of-doors prompted her to become a Rio Brazos Master Naturalist. In 2007 her residence became a certified Butterfly Habitat through the Texas Discovery Gardens. Nancy promises to regale us with her extensive collection of butterflies on their favorite plants.

**Master Naturalist**

Presented by Sandra Jones

12:00 p.m. - The Crape Myrtle Room



Sandra has been an Ellis County Master Gardener since 2006; as well as a Rio Brazos Master Naturalist in a tri-county area composed of Hood, Johnson and Somervell Counties. She has been a Master Naturalist since 2008.

The purpose of Sandra's presentation is to inform public of the State Program's mission to develop a Corp of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.

**Rainwater Harvesting**

Presented by Pam Daniel

1:00 p.m. - The Crape Myrtle Room



Pam Daniel is a real estate professional with Ebby Halliday REALTORS and has earned her EcoBroker certification and GREEN sustainable property designation. EcoBroker and the GREEN designation are educational and certification programs that train real estate professionals in energy efficient and "green" features in homes and buildings. Pam is an Ellis County Master Gardener and a Rainwater Harvesting Specialist through the Texas AgriLife Extension and is an accredited professional through the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association. Pam is president of Rainwater Harvesting Solutions, Inc. and has a 6,000 gallon rainwater collection system at her home in Midlothian.



## Neil Sperry – “Color in the Landscape”

(2:00 p.m. in the Crape Myrtle Room)

Neil Sperry has been a keynote speaker at the **Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn & Garden EXPO** for the last four years and we are pleased to have him return this year. His presentation will be *Color in the Landscape* and will begin at 2:00 p.m. Neil promises a new and completely different approach to this topic.

Neil Sperry's name has been synonymous with Texas gardening since 1970. He has broadcast over KRLD (1080 AM) in the Dallas/Fort Worth area since May, 1980. *Neil Sperry's Texas Gardening* is heard Saturday and Sunday mornings from 8-11:00 a.m.. Additionally, his daily and weekend radio programs are heard on more than 60 stations statewide via the Texas State Network.

Neil owns and publishes Neil Sperry's **GARDENS** Magazine. He publishes an annual Texas Gardening Calendar which features another of his loves, garden photography. He is the author of Neil Sperry's Complete Guide to Texas Gardening; the 4th best-selling gardening hardback in American history. Neil also is featured weekly in 20 Texas newspapers, including the Fort Worth Star Telegram and the San Antonio Express News.

Neil is a native Texan, having grown up in College Station. Both of his parents were on the faculty of Texas A&M. He attended Texas A&M, but his degrees in horticulture are from The Ohio State University.

## Vegetable Gardening & Drip Irrigation

Presented by Robert Shugart

4:00 p.m. - The Crape Myrtle Room

Robert has been an Ellis County Master Gardener since 1998; specializing in trees, vegetable gardening and drip irrigation. Robert especially wants to have a discussion with participants about his memories and experiences with gardening, Robert has endeared himself to his fellow Ellis County Master Gardeners with his love of tomatoes and his to desire to share them with the world. He promises to bring some of his "old" gardening tools for fun remembrances of old gardens.



## Everyone is looking forward to tomatoes!

By Pat Dockins

The Master Gardener's Plant Sales area will have a great selection of tomatoes at the **2009 Lawn and Garden EXPO on March 28**.

Tomatoes such as **Better Boy**, **BHN 444 Hybrid**, **Celebrity**, **Champion II**, **Early Girl**, **Jelly Bean**, **Jetsonic**, **Lemon Boy**, **Roma** and **Sunmaster**.

**Sunmaster** is a new one for us this year. It is a heat-tolerant variety that produces delicious tomatoes with a good balance of sugar and acid. The 7-8 oz. fruit is firm, smooth and very plentiful. This plant sets best when days are 87-96° degrees and nights are between 73 - 82° degrees.

It's good to have an early variety too and we recommend **Early Girl**. This tomato comes in early in the season with a dependable, large harvest of flavorful, solid 4 to 6 oz fruit. It has good disease resistance too.

For mid-season, we have **Champion II**. This variety was especially bred as a luscious sandwich tomato, solid meaty slices with just the right amount of sweetness. This plant has high yields of large fruit, bigger than Early Girl and earlier than Better Boy.

**Better Boy** has large crops of bright red 12 - 16 oz. fruit that is smooth and flavorful. One of the best tasting tomatoes available.

Of course there's **Celebrity**; a 1984 All America Selections Winner. This plant produces exceptionally flavorful fruit 8-12 oz. and is outstandingly disease resistance. With large clusters of consistently large, beautiful tomatoes.

Of course there's **Roma**; an all-around good tomato that good for eating and cooking. The fruit is about 3 inches long. A must for every garden.

Now to go along with those tomatoes every gardener should have some peppers. We'll have a nice selection such as **California Wonder**, a sweet bell, and a hot **Mucho Nacho** pepper. Then we have **Sweet Banana**, and **Volcano** that is a mildly hot pepper. So, come on down to the Lawn and Garden Expo March 28<sup>th</sup>, we'll have lots to entice you. If our tomatoes and peppers don't, we're hoping our beautiful perennials will.



## Rainwater Harvesting

By Pam Daniel



Homeowners wanting to conserve water and save on bills are looking to rainwater harvesting as an old concept with a new value in a time of water shortage and droughts. Efficient water use is increasingly important to Texas. With the state's growing population and limited supply of both groundwater and surface water, Texans must use water wisely. Learn how to capture, divert, store, and distribute rainwater for later use. Rainwater harvesting can be as simple as using a rain barrel or creating a rain garden, to as extensive as collecting and using for in home potable use.



### 2008 Master Gardener Intern Class Project

Global High School Rainwater System

By Rick Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener

The 2008 Master Gardener Intern Class project is finally moving from the conceptual stage to becoming a reality. Our class was unanimous in choosing to do something involving rainwater harvesting for our project. We looked at multiple options before finally deciding to partner with Global High School on a courtyard garden project they were considering. They have a small courtyard behind the school that basically became a swamp after heavy rains. The students of biology teacher Teresa Megahan, were designing a courtyard garden to provide an outdoor lunch seating area for the school. The stu-

dents had some very creative ideas, but a very limited budget. The Master Gardener class and the students had several meetings to design a project that would fit everyone's needs. The student's needed an outdoor refuge to provide a place to enjoy nature and get away from the daily school grind. The Master Gardener's needed a place for a demonstration rainwater harvesting system for Ellis County, and wanted to assist to be sure that the plants chosen were native and/or adaptive and appropriate for the shady area where the garden is located.

Once the project was agreed upon and all was planned, then came the preparation and action. The rainwater tank was picked up in Austin, Texas from BlueScope Water. The tank is manufactured in Australia and is a 1000 gallon Water Harvest Slimline Urban Rainwater Tank. The materials for the garden, pavilion and drainage area was either purchased at, or donated by some of our local vendors, such as The Greenery and Living Earth Technologies. We want to say a big thanks to the vendors above and to Blue Ox, Inc. for doing some of the finest dirt work I've ever seen. The first work day to complete all the above was on Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. Workers consisted of students, faculty, administration and parents from Global High School, as well as Ellis County Master Gardeners and volunteers. After about 8 hours of hard labor, the first stage was complete.

The second work day for the project was on Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup> of February. The project for that day was to plant the garden, install the drip irrigation and connect to the rainwater tank, and then cover all with a good supply of mulch. The rainwater tank will provide water via drip irrigation simply by opening one valve on the tank and using gravity to water the plants. We will then finish with a little touch up to the previous work, and the students will have a beautiful place to enjoy lunch while appreciating a little bit of nature. Something we should all have a goal to do each and every day!

[www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) - Remember it!

This is the Ellis County Master Gardener Association website, with links to more than 100 other websites. Following these links will yield information on a wealth of subjects; everything from bat conservation and bird gardening to home landscaping and water conservation.

Also, the website has information regarding Ellis County Master Gardener projects. On the website you can access to read or subscribe, for free, to the E-Gardening newsletter, which also includes upcoming events taking place in our community!

## It's March - What Needs to be Done?



### Planting and Sowing

- There is still time to plant vegetables such as lettuce, radishes, spinach, beets, and turnips if done very early this month.
- Cantaloupe seeds can be started in peat pots early in the month. Direct-sow seeds for warm-season vegetables such as tomatoes, beans, peppers, squash, melons, and corn late this month. Cantaloupe seeds can be started in peat pots early in the month
- Warm-season annuals that were started in January will be ready to transplant late this month.

### Fertilizing and Pruning

- Prune spring-flowering shrubs and vines (flowering quince, azaleas, forsythia, bridal wreath, Lady Banks rose, coral

honeysuckle) immediately after they finish blooming.

- Fertilize pecans with an all-nitrogen fertilizer this month, then again in April and May. Apply around the tree's drip line at the rate of 1 pound per inch of trunk diameter.
- Begin fertilizing roses with specialty rose food every 4 to 6 weeks from now until September.

### This and That

- Finish up the digging and dividing of late-summer and fall-flowering perennials very early this month.
- Select and order caladium tubers and coleus plants for later planting. Avoid planting caladiums until soil temperatures reach 70°F.

### Garden Watch

- Treat susceptible rose varieties with fungicide and systemic insecticide to protect against black spot, powdery mildew, aphids and thrips. Repeat at regular intervals during periods of high humidity and rainfall.
- Spray agricultural streptomycin while plants are blooming to protect members of the rose family (pears, pyracanthas, and cotoneasters) from fire blight.

### EarthKind™ Tips for March

Is your landscape contributing to a healthy and sustainable environment? There is one way to find out; just take the EarthKind™ Challenge. It's easy. Just answer a series of questions about the cultural principles and practices used in maintaining your landscape. [http://horticulture.tamu.edu/EKQuiz/ekchallenge\\_mg/](http://horticulture.tamu.edu/EKQuiz/ekchallenge_mg/).

## Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



*Castilleja indivisa* Engelm  
**Figwort Family (Scrophulariaceae)**

### Texas Paintbrush

Zone: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7  
Size: 6-18 inches  
Blooms: March - May, Annual

Nine species of paintbrush are found in Texas, but this is the only annual one. The conspicuous parts of the plant are the bracts, subtending and concealing the slender, one-inch, yellow-green flowers. Together they form showy three- to eight-inch terminal spikes. The bracts are brilliant red to re-orange, or orange. Alternate leaves are one to four inches long, and both stems and leaves are hairy. Texas paintbrush is frequently planted along interstate highways. Mixed with bluebonnets and an occasional white prickly poppy, it makes one of the state's most outstanding spring wildflower displays.

## Herb of the Month

*By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Calendula close up

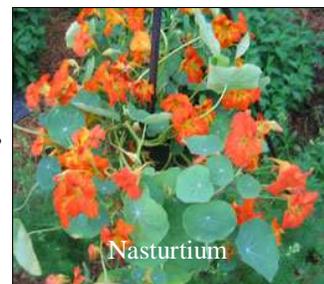
## Edible Flowers

*By Arlene Hamilton, Ellis County Master Gardener*

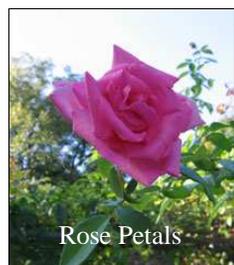
Have you ever walked through your garden, inhaled the wonderful aroma of all the beautiful flowers and herbs and thought "I'd love to taste that flavor". Well you can. Many of the common flowers in your garden are edible. The trick is knowing those that are and those that are not. People have been eating flowers for thousands of years. You probably have also. Do you like artichokes? Have you had Chinese hot and sour soup? Have you enjoyed a cup of herbal tea this winter? Take a look at the ingredients; they may include rose petals, hibiscus, mint, chamomile or other familiar flowers.

Some common edible flowers include calendula, chrysanthemum, English daisy, oxeye daisy, dandelion, daylily, gladiolus, grape hyacinth, hollyhock, honeysuckle, lavender, marigold, mustard, nasturtium, pink, rocket, rose, runner beans, scented geraniums, squash, violets, pansies, Johnny-jump-ups, tulips, and yucca. Also the blossoms of fruit and citrus trees are edible.

The best way to enjoy flowers is to proceed with caution. Smell your flowers; aroma is a large part of taste. Take little nibbles to get to know the flavor.



Nasturtium



Rose Petals

Use flowers in butter, sour cream, yogurt, and cheese. Spread on open sandwiches, over eggs, in cooked vegetables and potatoes. Sweet flowers such as rose and lavender in butter can be incorporated in icing and desserts. Savory flowers such as dill, chives, nasturtium and rocket add interest to dips, seafood, soups and salads. Use flowers to flavor jelly, vinegar, and honey. Stuff flowers such as hollyhocks, daylilies, squash blossoms, tulips and nasturtium with herbed cream cheese or guacamole, or something sweet such as chocolate mousse, sorbet or pudding. Float whole flowers in punch or chop and sprinkle over salad. Flowers can be delicious and add a special treat not just to the palette but to the eye as well. So get out into the garden and eat that daisy.

### Rules for Edible Flowers:

- Eat flowers only when you are positive they are edible.
- Eat only flowers that have been grown organically.
- Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries or garden centers.
- If you have hay fever, asthma or allergies, do not eat flowers.
- Do not eat flowers picked from the side of the road.
- Remove pistils and stamens from flowers before eating. Eat only the petals.
- Not all flowers are edible. Some are poisonous.

## Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

by Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

Hello, and welcome to the March edition of the Vegetable Gardeners Monthly. If you have questions that this article doesn't address, just give us a call at 972-825-5175 or contact us via the web at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) and ask for one of your Master Gardener Vegetable Gardening Specialist.

For March, there is still time to plant cool season vegetables early in the month, such as Swiss chard, collards and turnips Sow spinach seeds until the middle of the month and radishes all month.

Warm season vegetables can be seeded directly into the garden late month. Plant beans, cucumbers, cantaloupe, melons, sweet corn and squash. Tomatoes and peppers may be seeded, but both do best from transplants, late this month. Strawberries may be transplanted in sunny, well drained soil.

### Featured Vegetable of the Month

*By Rick Daniel  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



### Vegetable of the Month

#### TOMATOES:

**Planting dates:** For transplants, plant after all danger of frost in the spring (3-15 to 5-1). For fall (7-1 to 8-5). The sooner the better, as tomato plants stop setting fruit when nighttime temperatures reach 75 and daytime temperatures reach 92, which is usually late May to early June in this area. If we have a late freeze, do not try to salvage cold damaged plants, as they seldom fully recover.

**Planting method:** Plant with lots of compost and add a good slow release fertilizer. For organic gardening, add lava sand and green sand and lots of organic fertilizer. Dig out a large hole and fill with ½ compost and ½ removed soil. Sprinkle in fertilizer (slow release nitrogen) into hole and pre-water. For spring planting, do not plant too deep in heavy soils, as they remain cold longer and will often result in slow plant growth. Plant only 2-3 inches deep. Planting sideways is the best method in heavier clay soils. Set out transplants for a day or two to acclimate, and lay on their side so they will begin to grow upward before transplanting. Thoroughly water each plant after transplanting. Do not mulch in spring until 2-3 weeks after planting, to allow soil to continue to warm. Mulch immediately for fall tomatoes. Wrap cages with row cover to protect from cool weather and wind during early growing season, but remove when ready for fruit set. Tomatoes are wind pollinated, not from bees.

**Varieties:** Many people now like to raise the Heirloom variety, just be aware they generally produce about 20% fewer tomatoes. Common to North Texas are Merced, President, Jackpot, Celeb-

erty, Champion, Carnival, Better Boy, Brandywine, Roma and Sweet 1000 or Cherry Grande. Need to be VFN tolerant. Bush type, (determinate) are best with cages and vining type (indeterminate) are best with cages or a trellis.

**Culture:** If using cages, no need to prune or sucker your plants. Pinch off flowers the first few weeks, as this encourages additional flowering rather than fruit growth. Water evenly throughout growing season to prevent blossom-end rot and fruit cracking. Tomatoes don't like wet feet, so they do best when planted on raised beds. Best to use a drip system and water 2-3 hours every 2-3 days.

**Fertilizer:** Heavy feeder. Use starter solution for transplants and side dress when first fruit sets and side dress again at first harvest. Repeat every 2-3 weeks. Use high nitrogen fertilizer (21-0-0) or use a handful of organic fertilizer per plant. Corn gluten meal or blood meal is a good nitrogen fertilizer. Can also use a weekly foliar spray of water soluble fertilizer or compost tea.

**Harvest:** Pick tomatoes after ripening on the vine and store in a cool dry place, not in the refrigerator. Picked tomatoes can be stored in the shade. Light is not necessary to ripen immature tomatoes. Tomatoes on the vine, ripen from the inside out, so when red on the outside, they are ready. Tomatoes picked green, ripen from the outside in, so they may still be green on the inside when red on the outside.



(Continued from page 2)

**Monday, April 20, 6:00-7:30 - Irrigation and Water Saving Tips, Instructor: James Bell, \$10.00.** Come learn how to use sprinkler systems and save money. You can have a green lawn without spending so much money. Come and learn what's new in sprinkler systems. Also learn what a drip system can do for your flower beds and shrubs.

**Mondays, April 20-May 11** - (four classes) "Ag 101" - *Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners, Session A, Instructor: Mark Arnold, \$20.00.* Join this experienced instructor as you cover topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management.

**Monday, April 27, 6:00-7:30 - Energy Efficient Living, Instructor: Pam Daniel, \$10.00.**

Homeowners wanting to conserve energy and save on bills are looking for ways to improve efficiency and comfort. This presentation provides an overview of value added options and alternatives that can make a difference to you.

**Monday, May 4, 6:00-7:30 - Grow-Anything Soils, Instructor: Nancy Fenton, \$10.00.**

This class will concentrate on getting the soil right for special plants.

### Did You Know?

Spring can come early--indoors

Spring can come early indoors; it's easy. If you are tired of the blaahs of winter landscape, perk up the indoors by forcing tree branches for inside bloom. It's time to prune some trees anyway. Step by step, here are some tips:

- 1) Pick a tree or shrub that has spring blooms such as peach, plum, or forsythia. The best time to prune is when the weather is mild - during the middle of the day.
- 2) Choose long or short branches. Your vase size is your only limit.
- 3) After you bring the branches inside, immediately put them in water (vase).
- 4) One by one remove the branches and recut them. A fresh cut will absorb water better. For even more absorption, pound the end of the stem with a hammer. This creates more surface. Return to water-filled vase.
- 5) Set the plants in a cool place for a few days away from heated air. The more humidity, the better.
- 6) Add water every few days.
- 7) After a couple of weeks, buds will open.
- 8) When blooming ends, add the spent stems to the compost pile.



### Prairie Clogger Rose

By Gail Haynes  
Ellis County Master Gardener

Dr. Griffith Buck was a plant breeder at Iowa State University who had a passion for roses. He started breeding roses around 1950 using strains of very cold-hardy roses combined with modern hybrid teas and others. His goal was to produce roses that were disease-resistant and very hardy.



One of the roses bred by Dr. Buck is the Prairie Clogger; a medium red shrub. The medium-small ovoid-pointed buds of the ruby red open to single (8-10 petals), shallow-cupped to flat, 1.5- to 3-inch blooms of Indian lake which hold their color until the petals drop. The blooms are borne in clusters and have a pleasantly sweet fragrance.

The abundant, leathery foliage is dark olive green with copper tones when young and is tolerant of normal foliar disease. The thorns are tan and awl-like. The vigorous, bushy, 3- to 4-foot plant is erect and free-branching with abundant bloom throughout the season.

Shrub roses can be grown in hedges to create a show of color with low maintenance.

All of the Buck roses tend to tolerate the heat in Texas with minimal adverse effects. Not all of Dr. Buck's roses are going to adapt to our southern climate. Those cultivars which have adapted give outstanding performance from plants with tremendously strong genetic foundation.

Efforts are presently underway by Texas A&M to test 30 Buck cultivars in the first national EarthKind trial.

For further information, contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners at the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 701 S. Interstate 35E, Suite 3, Waxahachie or call 972-825-5717 or email [ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:ellis-tx@tamu.edu).

## *It's March - What Needs to be Done?*

By Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener



This is the month we begin to warm up, we hope it will rain some, and our warm weather gardening tasks and joys begin. The lawn is usually an issue in March so our tips will relate to lawn care.

Warm weather lawn care involves watering, feeding, mowing, and weed control. Check your sprinkler system if you have one to be sure it is operating at peak efficiency. Repair or replace any sprinkler heads that are broken, adjust the spray pattern to cover the lawn but not the driveway or sidewalk, and set the timer to meet the one inch per week requirement for lawn watering. There are some "magic" sensors on the market now to keep your system from coming on if it is raining. They will save water and some funny looks from your neighbors when your system comes on in a downpour!

Fertilizing lawns is also a March task. When grass begins to grow you need to do the spring fertilizer. Check with a local nursery about what type of fertilizer is best for your particular grass type. Most of Ellis County needs only Nitrogen, the first number on the bag. When spreading granular fertilizer, do your best to keep it off hardscapes; fertilizer spilled on sidewalks and driveways will wash off into the water system and be both wasted and detrimental. Slow release nitrogen fertilizer is easier on your lawn and supports a longer green time. Because my lawn area is as organic as I can make it, I use corn gluten meal as my nitrogen source and depend on all those grass clippings and ground up leaves that I am too lazy to catch or rake up to supply the rest.

Mowing needs to be done at least once a week and lawn experts would suggest you'll have a denser and greener lawn if you mow more often and don't catch the clippings. However, do mulch clippings into the lawn to get the benefit of that fertilizer you just put on. Over half of the fertilizer you applied is in the clippings you cut off your lawn. Mulching keeps those nutrients available to your grass plus helps keep the water where the grass can get to it. The height of the lawn should not be cut by more than one third of the length of the grass with each mowing. If you miss a week or so, just raise the height of the mower and then mow again a little earlier at the regular height. Be sure, too, that the mower blades are sharp and the mower is in peak working condition by having the mower maintained regularly, i.e. change the oil, spark plug, clean the carburetor and sharpen the blade.

**Weeds.** Weed control is usually a March issue with lawns. Weeds can be annual or perennial. They are classified as broad leaf, grass or sedge such as nut grass. Each type of weed has a different control, so call the Master Gardener office for more specific advice. Be aware that those yards that green up in January and February are either rye grass or weeds. St. Augustine and Bermuda take some warm weather to green up so be patient. They will crowd out most weeds once they start growing hard in the hot weather.

**Flowers.** Now that your lawn is in great shape and looking good, you can focus on flowers and vegetables in the landscape before the truly hot summer weather arrives. Your cool weather color plants like pansies, snapdragon and ornamental kale should still look good for another month to six weeks. When much warmer weather arrives, these cool season plants will need to be replaced. March is a great time to plant potted seedlings from the nursery, bare root roses, shrubs and trees, and vegetable seedlings. The roots will have some cool weather to get settled in and grow some before the hot summer weather. At the Master Gardener office we have lists of recommended trees, shrubs, fruits and vegetables for our area. Give us a call and we'll get that information to you.

When you are making purchasing decisions about what plants to put into your landscape, keep native and adapted plants as primary choices as well as what size you need in that space five years from now. It is hard to think ahead, but I just had to dig out 5 Silver Sages because 7 years ago I thought they would stay small and low. It was a wrong thought! The EarthKind designation on a plant means that it has been extensively tested to grow and flourish with minimum care. Selecting natives and adapted plants means they have already adjusted to living in our soil and our climate. They can live on less water in drought times and will continue to look good. We have lists of natives and adapted plants and trees at the Master Gardener office, too, and would be happy to get that to you.

**Vegetables.** March is time to think about planting vegetables. Direct sow seeds for warm-season vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, beans, squash, melons, and corn can be planted now. Prep the soil with compost and be sure to mulch for water conservation and better growth.

Mulching all tree wells and flowerbeds is a good idea. When mulching around trees, pull the mulch back 4 to 6 inches from the flare or trunk of the tree to avoid fungus and insect problems. Mulch contributes to keeping soil temperatures cooler and more constant and also aids in water retention during the hot months. 2-4" of mulch helps plants weather our hot summers and keeps your water bills a little lower.

Caladium bulbs may be available in nurseries now. They need to be planted once the soil temperatures reach 70 degrees, so not yet. Mothers' Day is a good time to plant the bulbs. You can buy now and store them in the garage until warmer weather to be sure you get the selections you want. They add a lovely color to summer shade beds. Some of the newer selections can tolerate a bit of

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sun so check the information at the nursery before deciding where to plant caladiums.

Our EXPO is Saturday, March 28 at the Waxahachie Civic Center. Sponsors across the county will have free tickets and flyers available. Information is also on our website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com). Plan to attend this great event. Master Gardeners will have plants for sale. Vendors will have booths where you can learn more about everything from lawn machinery to rainwater harvesting. The 4-H club will provide food. Neil Sperry is our keynote speaker from 2-3:30 pm and Master Gardeners will be presenting 45-minute sessions all day.

## LAWN WATERING MANAGEMENT DURING OUR DROUGHT CONDITIONS

By Jim Tachias, Ellis County Master Gardener



Two thousand and four was one of the driest of the past 50 plus years. You have to go back to 1954/1955 to find a similar dry pattern. That drought of the 50's lasted from 1953 until 1957.

Water is a limited resource in Texas. During these dry times our water supplies dry up to the point that cities and water districts must initiate rationing programs. Homeowners must learn to live with these watering restrictions and use the water wisely. Each city or water district adopts a policy based on the current conditions of it's water supply and individual situation. However, most rationing programs are similar. The following "Stages" will be similar to those used in your area.

**Stage I** - Usage for outdoor purposes such as lawns, gardens, car washing, power washing, etc., etc. will be restricted to one of the following:

- Alternate day use for customers with even/odd numbered addresses or north/south east/west on alternate days.
- Outdoor watering restricted to defined hours each day.
- City or water districts will provide a calendar notifying which days and hours.

### Homeowner should:

Water only when needed and to a depth of 6"; this normally will take 1" of water over an hour's duration to water to a depth of 6" in an area. Sandy, rocky and or sloping landscape will normally take different times to wet the soil to a depth of 6".

To determine how long it will take your particular sprinkler system to water to a dept of 6" follow the following steps:

- Set out 4 to 6 open top cans on the lawn (tuna or cat food cans are best).
- Turn sprinkler on for 30 minutes.
- Measure and record the depth of water in each can.
- Calculate the average depth of water from all cans.
- Use a hand trowel or shovel to determine how deep the soil was wet during the 30 minutes.
- Use the information on the depth of water penetrated and average depth of water as determined above to calculate how long it takes your sprinkler system to water to a depth of 6." Example: If your system puts out ½ inch of water in 30 minutes wetting the soil to a depth of 3 inches, you would need to run your system for one hour to water your soil to a depth of 6" inches.
- When needs watering; leaves will turn a dull purplish color, leaf blades will roll and footprints will show after walking across your yard.
- Mow often enough to remove no more than ⅓ of the leaf blades at one time
- Reduce fertility program.

**Stage II** - Water usage for outdoor purposes such as lawns, flower beds, car washing, etc. will be further restricted to only once a week.

### Homeowner should:

Same as Stage I. A lawn watered to a depth of 6" should be able to go a week without damage unless there are multiple 100 plus degree, windy days.

- Continue to mow as needed.
- Reduce fertility program even more.

**Stage III** - All water usage is prohibited except by hand-held hoses.

### Homeowner should:

- Hand water as much as you can by hand in the allotted time you have.
- Water only areas that are showing severe drought stress. Make sure that enough water is applied to effectively wet the soil.

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- Most warm season turfgrass species can survive short periods of drought stress. When under severe drought stress, grass may go dormant. Once watering or rains begin again grasses will recover assuming the drought has not been too severe. Recovery will be slow. Grasses that are able to go dormant during a drought are Buffalograss, Zoysia japonica, and Bermuda Grass. Other species do not possess this type of drought tolerance. Significant turfgrass damage can occur if these species are allowed to experience severe drought stress for an extended period of time.
- Eliminate fertilizing applications.

**Stage IV** - All outdoor water usage is prohibited.

**Homeowner should:**

- Mow as needed or not mow at all.
- Stop fertility program.
- Grass that dies will have to be replaced after the drought ends. Damage will depend on the length of the drought and the species of grass you have.

The following grass species table will give you the level of tolerance rating for grasses found in the area. Watering deep only when needed will provide you with a healthy green lawn even in periods of drought. Dry stress symptoms will develop when the lawn

<u>Grass Species</u>	<u>Level of Tolerance</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Buffalo Grass	High	Very good dormancy mechanism with excellent recovery potential from drought induced dormancy.
Bermuda Grass	Medium-High	Good dormancy mechanism with very good recovery potential from drought induced dormancy.
Zoysia Grass	Low-High	Some Zoysia japonica varieties (El Toro, Palisades) show very good (some varieties) (Variety Dependent) dormancy mechanism with a high drought recovery capability. However, most Zoysia matrella varieties (Emerald, Cavalier) have poor dormancy mechanisms and will experience significant turfgrass loss during long droughts.
St. Augustine	Medium	Moderate drought resistance due to an extensive, deep root system, but poor dormancy mechanism. Significant turfgrass loss during long drought periods.
Centipede Grass	Medium	Moderate drought resistance due to an extensive, deep root system, but poor dormancy mechanisms. Significant turfgrass loss during long drought periods.
Tall Fescue	Low-High	A cool-season grass. Level of drought tolerance is variety dependent (Variety Dependent). Drought resistant varieties possess deep root systems, but have poor dormancy mechanisms. Significant turfgrass loss during long drought periods.