



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume V, Issue 3

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

April, 2011

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'll find interesting, and 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/Susan Clark, co-editor



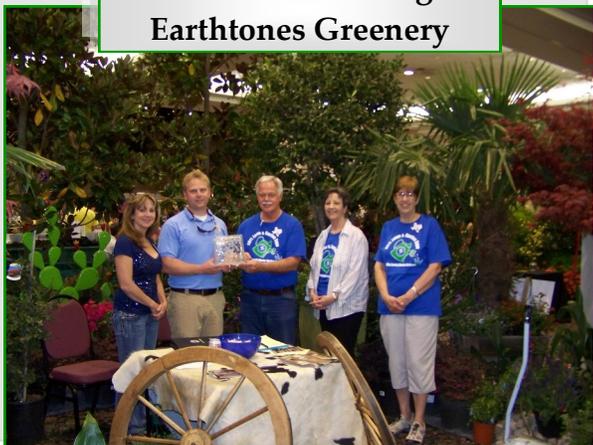
## ELLIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER 2011 11TH ANNUAL LAWN & GARDEN EXPO



**"Most Creative"  
Garden Inspirations**



**"Most Outstanding"  
Earthtones Greenery**

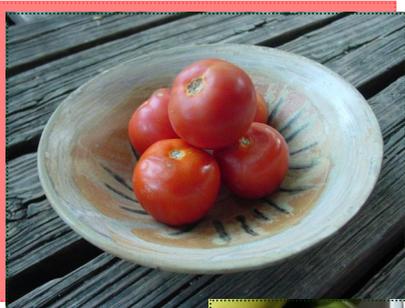


**Listen to KBEC.....**  
Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. on 1390 AM.  
The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!  
Melinda Kocian

**Inside this issue:**

<i>It's April, What Needs to be Done?</i>	2
<i>Beautiful Texas Lawns</i>	3
<i>April-What's Happening</i>	3
<i>Herb of the Month</i>	4
<i>In the Vegetable Garden</i>	5
<i>2011 Photo Contest Winners</i>	6
<i>Tips for a Successful Lawn/Garden</i>	7
<i>Landscape Gardening</i>	8

## It's April...What Needs to be Done?



### Bruschetta By Melinda Kocian

1 lg. loaf Italian bread, sliced into ½ “ slices  
1 clove garlic, halved  
ripe Roma tomatoes, chopped  
balsamic vinegar  
salt & pepper to taste  
basil leaves, slivered, to taste  
1 shallot (or mild red onion) minced fine  
1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil, to brush on toast  
grated fresh Parmesan cheese

Put tomatoes, shallots, vinegar, salt, pepper, and basil into a bowl. Drizzle with olive oil—adjust to your liking. Set aside for one hour. Place bread slices on a large cookie sheet. Lightly toast both sides under broiler. With pastry brush, lightly brush one side of toast with olive oil. Then, gently rub with the cut side of garlic. Spoon tomato mixture on toast slices, sprinkle cheese on top and enjoy.

### Planting

- Plant St. Augustine and hybrid Bermuda sod. St. Augustine can take some shade, but Bermuda needs full sun. Make good seed-to-soil contact and keep the sod moist until new roots are established. Common Bermuda can be started from seed, but it is better to hydro-mulch. In either case, keep the area moist for several weeks.

- Plant warm-season annuals from transplants. For sunny areas, consider zinnias (particularly ‘profusion,’ or ‘narrow-leaf’ also called ‘Mexican’ zinnias), firebush, pentas, moss rose, purslane, butterfly weed, lantana, sweet potato vine and Dahlberg daisy. Plants that prefer shade include: begonias, coleus, and impatiens. Wait until May to plant caladiums.

- April is the time to plant okra, black-eyed peas, corn and watermelons, either from seed or as transplants.
- You can still plant cucurbits like squash, cucumbers and melons. Many herbs can also be planted from transplants (for example, dill, parsley, fennel, mint, oregano, thyme).
- Wait until May to plant such hot-weather tropicals as hibiscus, esperanza and plumbago.

### Pruning and Fertilizing

- Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to lawns. This is usually after the third mowing when the entire lawn is green. Follow up with additional fertilizer in June (optional) and again in September. St. Augustine and Bermuda grass need one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet, 2 to 3 times a year.
- Mow Bermuda grass frequently at 1½ inches to keep thick and healthy; mow

St. Augustine at 2½ inches.

- Use a mulching mower and leave grass clippings on the ground. They will provide a source of nitrogen to feed the lawn.

### Garden Watch

- Closely inspect plants for insects; identify pests. Many insects are beneficial: ladybugs, garden spiders, praying mantis and assassin bugs. If the insect is a type that must be controlled, use an insecticide for that insect. Carefully read and follow label instructions.
- Treat individual fire ant mounds with an appropriate bait. Beneficial nematodes (microscopic worms) that may be purchased at many nurseries are also effective. Make sure you purchase the type that kills fire ants. If only a few mounds are present, avoid treating the entire lawn with an insecticide. It can kill earthworms and other insects that are not harmful.

### Odds and Ends

- Read the label on purchased plants. Do they need sun or shade? Check the hardiness zone for perennial plants. The hardiness zone is a geographically defined area in which a specific category of plant life is capable of growing. Ellis County is in zone 8, meaning the plant is hardy from 10 to 15 degrees in the winter.
- After planting annuals in the landscape, use any leftovers to make interesting container groupings. Visit your local nursery or garden center. There are many new varieties of plants from which to choose. For example, there are now coleuses that can take full sun.
- Take cuttings and divisions of plants from your gardens that are rare, unusual or hard to find. Share them with others.

### Tips for Tomatoes

The mistaken idea that tomatoes were poisonous probably arose because the plant belongs to the nightshade family, of which some species are truly poisonous. The strong, unpleasant odor of the leaves and stems also contributed to the early idea that the fruits were unfit for food. Tomatoes are rich in vitamin A and potassium. They are moderately rich in vitamin C and B-complex. They are naturally low in calories, sodium, and fat.

# Beautiful Texas Lawns



## Having that beautiful lawn

A beautiful lawn is the most important feature for a well landscaped home. A homeowner's investment in a lawn and other landscaping is as good as any home improvement in increasing the value of a residence. A green, well-groomed lawn is the first thing visitors notice as they look at your home.

## Choosing a turfgrass

The two most widely used and recommended warm season turfgrasses for this area are Bermudagrass and St. Augustine. Your choice of a turfgrass depends on the amount of shade in your yard and the availability of water for your grass.

Common Bermudagrass is a fine-textured (thin bladed) grass and one of the most widely adapted turfgrasses for lawns in Ellis County. It forms a very dense, healthy turf when fertilized and mowed correctly. Bermudagrass is drought tolerant, spreads rapidly, and tolerates traffic better than most turfgrasses. The negatives with Bermudagrass are its poor shade tolerance and its ability to rapidly invade flower beds, vegetable gardens, and landscape plantings via underground runners. It can be sodded or grown from seed. Seeding, of course, is cheaper. If seeding, use 1 to 2 pounds seed per 1,000 square feet. Seed when the soil temperature has reached 70+ degrees, which is

usually in mid-April. Seeding too early is a waste of seed as it will rot before it germinates.

St. Augustinegrass is a wide-bladed, coarse textured species that forms a dense, thick lawn crowding out most weeds. It is the most shade tolerant of Texas turfgrasses and is easily kept out of flower beds by pulling above-ground runners. St. Augustine grass is susceptible to a virus problem called SAD. The varieties, 'Raleigh' and 'Delmar' have proven resistance to this virus and have improved cold

*(Continued on page 4)*

## What's Happening in April

**Sunday, April 1 - 30—Ennis Bluebonnet Trails and April 16-17, 2011—Ennis Bluebonnet Trails Festival.** Visit [http://www.visitennis.org/Festivals/Bluebonnet\\_Trails.html](http://www.visitennis.org/Festivals/Bluebonnet_Trails.html) for more information.

**Now through April 10—"Dallas Blooms"**, Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden, 8525 Garland Road, Dallas, Texas 75218  
Open daily 9am - 5pm, (214) 515-6500

**Saturday, April 2 - Sunday, April 3—EarthTones Greenery Open House Sale/Event,** [www.earthtonesgreenery.com](http://www.earthtonesgreenery.com) for info.

**Saturday, April 2—EarthTones Greenery Spring Main Event.** Door prizes, BBQ lunch starts at 11 am.  
810 E. Main, Midlothian, (972) 723-0702

**Sunday, April 8 - Tuesday, April 10—"Dogwood Blooms Tours"**, Dogwood Canyon, Cedar Hill. Call Patty McGill at (214) 309-5811 to reserve your space.

### Texas Discovery Gardens, Fair Park

**Saturday, April 9, 9 am - 12 pm—Victory Gardens Workshop: Discover the Art of Summer Vegetable Gardening**

**Saturday, April 16, 11 am - 12 pm—Garden Walk: Get Outside in the Garden**

**Saturday, April 30, 9 am - 12pm—Butterfly Gardening Workshop**

Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Duncanville, TX  
(Some events include important details. Information at [www.audubondallas.org](http://www.audubondallas.org) or contact Jim Varnum at (214) 543-2055 or [jvarnum@aol.com](mailto:jvarnum@aol.com).)

**Saturday, April 9, 10 am - 12 pm—Early Spring Wildflower Walk** with Jim Varnum.

**Saturday, April 16, 9 am - 11am—Conservation in Action Workday.** Volunteers remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. They provide snacks, water, pruning shears, shovels, and work gloves. All you need to bring is sun screen and bug repellent.

**Saturday, April 30, 8 am - 10 am Painted Bunting Walk** with Marcy Brown Marsden

**Saturday, April 30, 10:30 am—Jim Varnum conducts a Special Walk to Observe Milkweeds and Monarchs** at CRP.

Garden Inspirations, 108 Ridge Crest Dr., Waxahachie, (214) 497-3918

**Beginning April 11—Natural Solutions and Vegetable Garden Series.** This is a four week series of classes/workshops about basic organic vegetable gardening. For more information, go to: <http://www.gardeninspirations-tx.com/classes.html>

**Saturday, April 30, 9 am - 11 am—Basic Backyard Chickens** by Tara Pommer. This class will be about your basic backyard chickens! Subjects include: breeds, housing, feeding, health, the mechanics about egg-laying, and the local laws. Fee \$19.00

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### April 2011 Herb of the Month – Herbal Pet Care and Pest Control

If your family includes cats, dogs, or other backyard pets, you can keep them healthy and insect free using some common herbs. Herbs are multi-talented members of the plant world. Aside from being the source of both natural and synthesized medicines, they spice up our food and supply us with an array of sweet-smelling perfumes and potpourris. Another use of these wonderful plants is their ability to safely control unwanted insects. Unlike synthetic chemicals, whose ingredients and quantities must be continually revised and increased in response to insects' immunities to them, pests don't become tolerant of botanical repellents.

Many herbs emit powerful aromatic and volatile oils, which may appeal to humans, but are disliked by many insects. Because of their acute sense of smell these aromas are unpleasant to insects. These pests will abandon areas where such herbs

in fresh, dried, powdered, or essential oil forms are used. These same herbs are often tolerated, if not enjoyed, by pets.

The strongest herbal repellents against pests such as fleas, lice, ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, and gnats include Citronella, Eucalyptus, Pennyroyal, Rosemary, Southernwood, and Wormwood. Milder ones include Basil, Bay, Lavender, Sage, and Thyme.

**Citronella** – Although there are many lemon aroma plants in garden centers and nurseries labeled as citronella, the one thought to be the most effective as a mosquito control is Lemon grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*). Lemon grass grows well in North Texas, and will winter over down to 10 degrees with heavy mulch. It grows best in full sun, good drainage, and requires little water after established. Plant around sitting areas or harvest the long grass stems, chop into

pieces and strew in areas where pets and people like to rest. Exercise caution when handling, as the long blades of grass are sharp and can cause cuts.



**Pennyroyal** – (*Mentha pulegium*) is used to repel mice and insects such as fleas. Traditionally, pennyroyal was planted around doorways, used in bedding, and as a strewing herb. Its oil is used commercially in soaps and detergents. A strong infusion of its leaves can be used as an insect spray. Pour two cups of hot

water over one cup chopped leaves, let steep for 30 minutes, strain and use as a rinse on your pet. Pennyroyal needs moist, semi-shady conditions for best growth in the South. Note: Pennyroyal leaves should NOT be ingested by pets or people.

**Rosemary** – (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

(Continued on page 5)

#### Beautiful Texas Lawns (Continued from page 3)

tolerance. They are the most recommended selections for north Texas at this time. Laying solid sod or checkerboarding is recommended. Four inch plugs may be used on 12 inch centers. Expect to treat weeds growing in the bare areas until the St. Augustine has covered. Planting season is mid-March through mid-September.

There are other less frequently used turfgrasses that will grow in this area; warm season grasses such as: hybrid Bermudagrasses, buffalograss and zoysia-grass, and cool season grasses such as: tall fescue, perennial rye, and annual rye. For further information on these grasses, contact the master gardeners at the Ellis County AgriLife Extension Office. Our newly published *Lawn, Garden and Landscape Manual*, written and compiled by the Ellis County Master Gardeners, has more in detail on these grasses.

#### Soil preparation prior to establishment

Outlined below are the recommended steps for preparation of the soil prior to planting. Soil preparation is equally as important whether using sod, seed, or plugs.

Take a soil test to see if the soil needs amending to correct the soil pH, or is deficient in a particular plant nutrient. Soil test kits are available from A & M. Visit your county Extension office to obtain the test kit.

When possible, add a source of organic material such as peat moss, rotted sawdust, compost, or rotted rice hulls to improve the soil. This is especially important for the heavier clay soils here in Ellis County. Mix this material into the top 4 to 6 inches of the native soil.

Grade the soil to provide proper surface drainage. The lawn should be graded so that it slopes away from buildings and sidewalks.

**Final grade:** Hand rake the soil to remove any big dirt clods or rocks. Check to make sure there are no depressions in the lawn. Low areas will trap water and make it difficult to maintain the turfgrass properly. If depressions exist, add a good sandy loam soil to level these depressed areas.

Add a starter fertilizer. Adding a good quality fertilizer that has adequate phosphorus aids in the development of new root growth. Examples of a good starter fertilizer include: 10-20-10, 10-10-10, or 13-13-13. Apply approximately 10 to 15 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet.

These are excerpts taken from the new *Lawn, Garden and Landscape Manual* written and compiled by the Ellis County Master Gardeners. The manual made its first appearance at the recent lawn and garden expo. The manual will be for sale at the Master Gardener Booth at the upcoming Farmers Market beginning in May.

## In the Vegetable Garden

With Susan Norvell

Ellis County Master Gardener



### SWEET CORN 101

What says summer cookout more than a juicy hamburger and succulent, just-picked sweet corn? Corn, depending on variety, generally takes from 65 to 95 days from planting to harvest, so mid-April to early May is the time to plant sweet corn in North Texas. But before you run out to plant your corn, let's go over some corn basics that, hopefully, will make you more successful and lead to many enjoyable meals.

Corn will take up more space than many other vegetables in your garden. There are a couple of reasons for this. Unlike tomatoes or peppers where one plant produces many, many fruits, corn averages only one or two ears per stalk. If you want a lot of corn, you need a lot of corn plants. Corn is wind pollinated, which means that you need to plant several rows of corn in order to increase your chances that the pollen will land on the silks of the adjacent row of corn. Planting a long single row of corn is a common mistake and often leads to poorly-filled ears.

As the corn plants reach their mature height, the tassels release grains of pollen which fall onto the silks of surrounding plants. When a grain of pollen lands on a silk, it germinates and works its way down the silk. When it reaches the kernel, fertilization takes place and the kernel begins to develop. Each potential kernel on an ear of corn must be fertilized by a grain of pollen in order to fill out completely. Rather phenomenal, don't you

think?

The size of your corn patch will depend on how much space you can devote to growing corn and how much you would like to harvest. Traditionally, corn is planted in rows 30 to 36 inches apart with 12 inches between each plant. In this instance, a 10' by 10' plot would accommodate 4 rows with 9-10 plants in each row for a total of about 36-40 plants. Corn can be planted more intensively by planting seeds in closely spaced double rows, leaving 18-24 inches between the double rows.

Locate your cornfield in full sun and use fresh seed to get a good start. Corn is a fast grower and a heavy feeder. The ideal pH for corn is 6.0-7.0, although corn seems to tolerate more alkaline soil conditions. Since corn is a heavy feeder, a pre-planting application of organic fertilizer in the amount of 2-3 pounds per 100 square feet is recommended. Side-dress when the plants are 8-10 inches, and again, when they are 18-24 inches using approximately ¼ pound (1/2 cup) of fertilizer per 10 feet of row. Joe Masabni, Ph.D. and Texas A&M vegetable extension specialist, says this is essential as the yield potential of corn is determined by the time it has reached 24 inches and adding more fertilizer after this point is not going to affect the number of rows or kernels.

Planting at the right time will go a long way to insuring a good harvest. Generally, soil temperatures should be between 50°-55° before planting corn. Seed emergence

may be spotty in cold or wet spring soils. You can compensate by planting seeds more thickly and then thinning the plants later. Sow seeds 1/2 inch deep, 4 inches apart and then thin to 12 inches. Corn will need an inch of water each week, so be prepared to water during dry periods.

Windy conditions are a way of life in early spring in North Texas. To help prevent the corn stalks from blowing over in a high wind, "dirt" the plants by pulling soil up around the base of the stalks. This will help to stabilize the plants and keep them from falling. You can also put a stake in each corner of your corn patch and a couple along the sides and rope it in.

It's almost impossible to grow corn without having to deal with the corn earworm. Eggs of the corn earworm are laid by the light brown, female moth. Corn earworms can be controlled with regular applications of Bt once the silks have appeared. The worms generally feed at the tips of the ears, so if all else fails, cut off the damaged portion and feast on the rest. Corn is ready to harvest about three weeks after the silks appear. The ears should feel full, the silks should appear dry, and the kernels will spurt a milky juice when pierced.

Still interested in that great tasting summer corn? There's still one more thing you need to do and that's decide which variety you want to plant. For a list of corn that will grow well in our area, please contact Ellis County Master Gardeners at (972) 875-5175 or visit the website at [ecmga.com](http://ecmga.com).

### Herb of the Month (Continued from page 4)

leaves, along with Lavender flowers, make an excellent, soothing, healing, and pest-repellent conditioning rinse for pets. With four cups of hot water, steep one cup fresh, chopped herbs. Steep in a covered container for at least one hour. Cool and strain. Use within one or two days. This tea can also be poured into a spray container and used as a room freshener. Rosemary leaves are gentle enough that fresh leaves can be rubbed directly on pet's skin

to provide temporary insect-repelling relief. Rosemary thrives in the North Texas sun and soil. Give it lots of room in the landscape, as it will grow to four feet or more.

**Southernwood** (*Artemisia abrotanum*) and **Wormwood** - (*A. absinthium*) have been used since antiquity to repel insects. Many gardeners find



that Artemisias, extremely aromatic herbs, inhibit the growth of neighboring plants. However, set around fences or perimeters of gardens, they can be useful to repel slugs, snails, rodents, and certain small animals. They are also a repellent to garden and cloth moths.

Look for more info about using herbs for healthy pets in next month's column.

## 2011 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

The Ellis County Master Gardeners would like to extend a gracious thank you to all who contributed photos in the 2010 Ellis County Master Gardener Association photo contest. We received nearly two hundred and fifty entries. If you missed this year's contest, be sure to get your camera out and be ready for 2012!

### AND THE WINNERS ARE...



In the Garden



Patty Smith, Waxahachie

Single Specimen



Rebecca Grogan, Waxahachie

Single Specimen



Randy Owens, Waxahachie



In the Garden



Victoria Cullen, Waxahachie

Single Specimen



Susan Pannill, Waxahachie

In the Garden



Rhonda Miller, Waxahachie





## April Tips for a Successful Lawn and Garden

By Kathy Haney

Ellis County Master Gardener

Now that temperatures are rising, there's lots to do to prepare for another gardening season.

If you didn't fertilize in March for your established lawn, do it now using a high nitrogen fertilizer and water it in thoroughly. If weeds are the major green part of your lawn, consider using a broad leaf weed killer product or pull the weeds out by hand. When using a weed killer, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's direction for its use and for discarding the empty containers.

After you have planted your annuals in the landscape, use any leftover plants to make interesting groupings in containers to use as accents. When planting containers use these three components: a thriller (something very tall and showy), a spiller (plants that cascades over the side of the container), and then the filler (which takes up any space not used by the thriller or spiller). Select plants for the container according to the amount of sun or shade the area receives.

When selecting plants for your containers or landscape, consider those which have gone through several years of field tests by Texas Agri-Life Research and Texas AgriLife Extension. These plants are called Texas Superstars. They are Texas tough and perform well in our harsh growing conditions. During the field trials of these plants, there was minimal soil preparation, minimal added water, and no pesticides. This means that the average home landscaper will have success with these hardy plants.

Some examples of these plants that you

might recognize or might want to look for are the new Gold Lantana, Tidal Wave Petunia, and Belinda's Dream Rose. Visit [TexasSuperstars.com](http://TexasSuperstars.com) for more information and pictures of these plants.

Mulching is a standard practice in many vegetable gardens, flower and shrub beds, and around fruit and ornamental trees. Although mulching, by definition, is simply placing a layer of organic or inorganic material on top of the soil, the benefits to the internal soil structure seem miraculous.

Organic mulches such as shredded pine bark or compost work to conserve water by significantly reducing moisture evaporation from the soil. Mulch also reduces weed populations, prevents soil compaction, and keeps soil temperature more moderate.

The 2008 Master Gardener interns tested different types and depths of mulch in the hot summer months of July and August. We found that the ground temperature can be over 10° less than the actual outside temperature with the use of 2-4 inches of mulch. As the mulch decomposes, it will enhance your soil. You can find a variety of types and colors of mulch at most stores that have plants for sale. To be successful in the garden, you should plan, prepare, select properly, plant correctly, and MULCH!

April is the month that many wildflowers are beginning to bloom. Bluebonnets, Indian paintbrushes, and lots of other native wildflowers grace our fields, highways, and yards. Wildflowers thrive in conditions much different than other plants. Poorer soils and drier conditions do not deter their growth and they do not like to

be overwatered or fertilized. If you want bluebonnets in your landscape, you can start planning, but the planting will have to wait until September and October. Try mixing the seeds with a small amount of soil or sand for easier planting. Be sure to tamp the soil onto the seeds for good soil-to-seed contact. After your plants bloom and go to seed, you must leave them in the landscape until the seed pods dry up and split to drop their seeds for next year. Although not the prettiest, this is an essential part of the growth cycle. Tell your neighbors that nature is at work!

Butterflies usually make their appearance in the spring once the temperature is above 60°. A true butterfly garden is designed not only to attract butterflies, but also offers places for them to hibernate and lay eggs, and for the larva, or caterpillars, to feed.

Some favorite plants of the butterfly include asters, butterfly bush, coneflowers, impatiens, lilac, marigold, verbena, and yarrow. Try for a large swath of color which makes it easier for the butterfly to find your garden. Limit the use of insecticides if you hope to attract butterflies.

Shrubs and tall grasses provide a needed shelter so that butterflies can rest and have protection from the weather. At night, they roost, often on the underside of a leaf. Shallow bird baths or dishes of water with pebbles to land on are very attractive to butterflies. A flat rock in the garden provides a spot for the butterfly to land and bask in the sun if temperatures are less than 80°.

Whatever your plans for your lawn and garden, be sure to get outside and enjoy the commencement of Spring!

*What's Happening in April... (Continued from page 3)*

### Lighthouse for Learning

With the Ellis County Master Gardeners and AgriLife Extension

For reservations, call Melissa Cobb, (972) 923-4631, ext. 142.

**Thursdays, April 7 - May 5 (4 classes) 6-8pm, "Ag 101"—Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners – Instructor** Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, cost: \$22.00. This class will cover topics, such as soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management.

**Monday, April 11, 6-7:30—"Rainwater Harvesting", Instructor** Pam Daniel, cost: \$12.00. Learn how to capture, divert, store and distribute rainwater for later use.

**Monday, April 18, 5:30-8:00—"Plant Propagation", Instructor** Walt Friis, cost: \$12.00.

**Monday, April 25, 6-7:30—"Growing Texas Natives", cost: \$12.00** Learn about native and adapted plants that thrive in TX.



## Landscape Gardening

By: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com). Check this website for information on gardening in Ellis County, sign up for a monthly newsletter, or access other websites including the Texas A&M Horticulture website. Questions for Master Gardeners will be answered with a return telephone call or email, if you leave a message at (972) 825-5175.

### **Autumn Sage: *Salvia Greggii***

by Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist, TX AgriLife Ext Service

Occasionally, the common name of a plant is a bit misleading. The name 'Autumn Sage' conjures the image of a fall-flowering herb, yet Bailey Hortorium's *Hortus Third* describes this plant as a fall-flowering sub-shrub.

My experience with the Autumn Sage over a twenty-year period has been that it is almost constantly in flower from late spring until hard frost. Robert A. Vine's book, *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of the Southwest*, contains a more accurate description of the flowering habit, indicating summer and fall flowering on the shrub up to three feet.

The species name 'Greggii' honors Josiah Gregg (1806-1850), an early American explorer and botanist. *S. Greggii* is native to dry, sunny sites in southern and western Texas and New Mexico. Although generally ignored by most nurserymen and home gardeners in this century, *S. Greggii* was a frequently-found plant in the cottage gardens of early Texas.

Once established, the plant usually thrives on existing rainfall. It does need at least tolerably good drainage, and thrives in full-sun or partially-shaded exposures.

In recent years, the discovery of a broad range of colors within the species has greatly increased their landscape value. Pure white, rich red, pink, and salmon have now joined the more common purplish-red selections. Flowers appear in terminal racemes, are tube-shaped and two-lipped, and about one inch long. Leaves are opposite, narrowly oblong, with blade length 1/2 to 1-1/4 inches long. The foliage has a pleasant, spicy scent. Propagation is usually from cuttings taken during the growing season.

Landscape uses of *Salvia Greggii* are many. It is a natural for use in containers, masses, or borders, for low-maintenance landscape color. In landscape develop-

ments where a refined look is desired, the plants respond very well to periodic shearing to remove old flower stems during the summer. Occasional light applications of a balanced fertilizer, and irrigation during unusually dry periods, will ensure repeat flowering from May through November in most of Texas.

*Salvia Greggii* is a beautiful, practical source of landscape color in most of Texas. It is another example of 'rediscovering' plants that were popular in the early gardens of Texas, but ignored by most people in the recent past. It will be available from Texas wholesale nurseries specializing in native plants, as well as garden centers in much of the state.

### **Garden Checklist for April**

- Prune spring-flowering shrubs soon after flowering. Keep the natural shape of the plant in mind as you prune, and avoid excessive cutting except where necessary to control size.
- Roses have high fertilizer requirements. For most soils, use a complete fertilizer for the first application just as new growth starts, then use ammonium sulfate, or other high nitrogen source, every 4 to 6 weeks, usually just as the new growth cycle starts following a flowering cycle. For organic sources use cottonseed, rotted manures or alfalfa meal.
- Continue to spray rose varieties susceptible to black spot, using a spray recommended for fungus control every 7 to 10 days. Many of the Old Garden Roses and some of the newer ones have considerable resistance to black spot.
- Climbing hybrid tea roses may be pruned as soon as they complete flowering.
- Removing spent flowers, trimming back excessive growth, and applying fertilizer to an established annual bed can do wonders towards rejuvenating and extending the life of the planting.
- As soon as azaleas have finished

flowering, apply an acid type fertilizer at the rate recommended. Don't over fertilize, as azalea roots are near the surface and damage can occur. Water thoroughly after fertilizing.

- Seeds of amaranthus, celosia, cosmos, marigold, portulaca, zinnia and other warm-season annuals can be sown directly in the beds where they are to grow. Keep seeded areas moist until seeds germinate. Thin out as soon as they are large enough to transplant. Surplus plants can be transplanted to other areas.
- It will soon be time for bagworms to attack junipers and other narrow-leaved evergreens. Control measures, such as Sevin dust or spray, should be applied while the insects and the bags are about one-half inch in length.
- When caterpillars attack live oak trees en masse, it is very alarming, but usually nothing can be done. A healthy live oak will usually regrow its leaves and resume normal activities.
- Check new tender growth for aphids. A few can be tolerated, but large numbers should be controlled. Always follow label instructions on approved pesticides for control. Washing them off with a strong spray of water may be all that is necessary for adequate control.
- Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clips and storing in a sealed glass jar in your refrigerator.
- Start weeding early in the flower garden. Early competition with small plants can delay flowering. A mulch will discourage weed growth and make those that do come through easier to pull.
- Soil purchased should be examined closely. Often, nut grass and other weeds, nematodes, and soilborne disease are brought into the yard through contaminated soil sources.



## Thank You to our 2011 Expo Sponsors!

### Gold Sponsors



Waxahachie



### Silver Sponsors



(Emmis/Athens)



### Bronze Sponsors

Waxahachie Civic Center

### Green Sponsors

Citizens National Bank of Texas  
Ennis Garden Club  
Holcim (Texas) LP  
Tex-Scapes Greenery  
RiverMist Pools & Spas  
Roland's Nursery & Landscape

Please Support  
These 2011 Expo  
Sponsors!



Interested in becoming a  
2012 Expo Sponsor or  
Expo Exhibitor?

Contact James Kocian at  
[expo.ecmga@yahoo.com](mailto:expo.ecmga@yahoo.com)

Date to be announced