



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume II, Issue 10

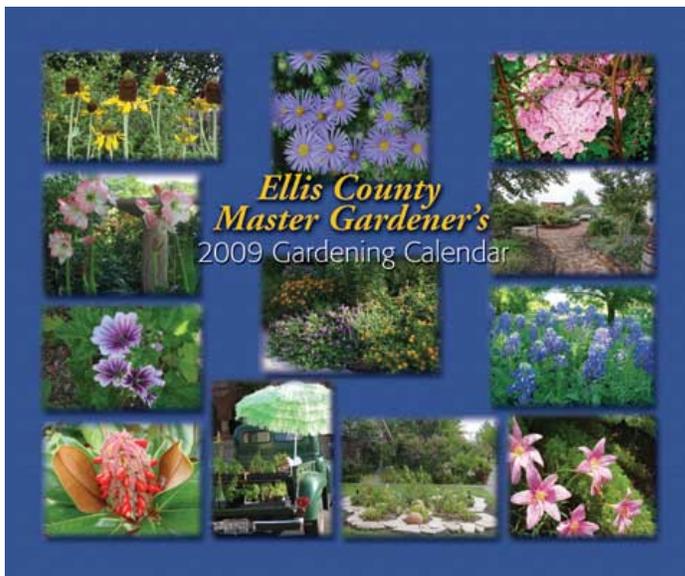
Official E-letter of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association, Waxahachie, Texas

December, 2008

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

## The 2009 Gardening Calendars are Here!



### 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!

The much awaited, 3rd annual, Ellis County Master Gardener gardening calendar is here and it's .....FREE..... from the following sponsors. Without them it could not have happened. Please visit one of them to pick up your calendar.

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

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**NOTE:** Distribution of the calendars to all locations should be completed by Monday, December 8th.

## It's December - What Needs to be Done



### Featured Plant for December

#### Juniper

*Juniperus virginiana*

The tree is called a cedar, but is actually a juniper. This evergreen conifer is tough, and drought tolerant, and the female tree has blue berries in the fall. It can grow in any soil, and is often seen growing in solid rock. Best used as a screen or evergreen background.

Exposure: Full sun  
Size: Ht 40' Spread 20'  
Spacing: 20-30'

#### Planting and Sowing

- From mid- to late-month, plant the tulip and hyacinth bulbs that have been chilling for the past 45 days.
- Relocate the established trees and shrubs that were root-pruned in September after they go dormant, usually after the season's first hard freeze.
- Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to attract birds to your landscape and for winter color. Among your best choices are: yaupon hollies, pyracanthas, mahonias, western soapberries, and junipers.

#### Fertilizing and Pruning

- Remove mistletoe from trees with a long-handled pole pruner, as there is no effective spray control. Be sure to do this before it produces berries, as birds will spread it by carrying the berries to other branches.
- Fertilize recently transplanted trees and shrubs with a high- phosphate root-stimulator during their first year in their new home.
- Cut out tree roots extending beneath your home's foundation, driveways, patio or walkways. Install a root barrier made of vinyl fabric to prevent further growth.

- Remove old stalks and leaves from perennial gardens to neaten-up for the winter season and apply a thick layer of winter mulch.
- Add more high-nitrogen fertilizer to your compost pile at the rate of one cup per cubic yard of material.

#### Garden Watch

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight freeze-cloth cover, which are available at most nurseries and home centers.
- Disconnect water hoses and lawn sprinklers to protect them from freezing, but keep them handy for use during occasional winter dry spells

#### Tip of the Month

The only sure way to determine your soils needs is by having a soil test performed. December is a great time to ready the garden for the upcoming growing season and a soil test now will save time and money in the spring. A soil test kit can be obtained from your local county extension office.



### Master Gardener's Taking Applications

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association are now available for the 2009 Master Gardener training program.

The Texas Master Gardeners are trained members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens.

They are enthusiastic, willing to learn and to help others and are able to communicate with diverse groups of people. The Master Gardener training program equips participants with horticultural knowledge in plant selection, proper planting methods, disease and weed management, trees and shrubs, plant identification methods, fertilization, water conservation, soil and plant nutrition, pruning methods and more.

This is a great opportunity for community gardening enthusiasts to gain an increased knowledge in horticulture, improve their gardening skills and develop a better understanding of the gardening issues Ellis County faces. The program goal is to develop a pool of well-trained Master Gardeners prepared to serve the residents of Ellis County.

The time commitment is from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm every Tuesday and Thursday during the month of February. Additionally, trainees will be asked to complete 75 hours of volunteer service before graduating from the Master Gardener program.

The Master Gardener program offers members numerous methods for obtaining their volunteer hours while serving Ellis County. One such method is through the Junior Master Gardener program

Application forms are available on the Ellis County Master Gardener's Web site at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) or by calling 972-825-5175. Tuition for the program is \$100.

# EarthKind™ and Texas Superstar Designations

By James Kocian



## **What is EarthKind™?**

EarthKind uses research-proven techniques to provide maximum gardening and landscape enjoyment while preserving and protecting our fragile environment.

The objective of EarthKind is to combine the best of organic and traditional gardening and landscaping principles to create a new horticultural system for the 21st Century, a research-proven system based on real-world effectiveness and environmental responsibility.

Earth Kind goals are to reduce the volume of water, fertilizers, and pesticides used in the landscape and the volume of yard wastes entering landfills.

EarthKind employs the latest scientifically-sound, research-based information and techniques of plant selection and culture to avoid pest problems before they occur. We recommend using pesticides only as a last resort. If a pesticide becomes absolutely necessary, then select the most EarthKind or environmentally responsible product available.

Putting EarthKind techniques into everyday practice will help your family, your business, your community and your environment. Remember, "EarthKind to benefit humankind."



## **What Are EarthKind Roses?**

EarthKind rose is an important designation given to select roses by the Texas A&M University Agriculture program. EarthKind roses have been through rigorous statewide testing and evaluation by a team of horticultural experts and found to possess the high level of landscape performance and outstanding disease and insect tolerance/resistance required for this special designation.

EarthKind roses are among the most thoroughly tested and environmentally responsible plants for the use in Texas landscapes. These roses do very well in almost any soil type, from the well-drained acid sands of East Texas to the poorly aerated, highly alkaline clays of central and Southwest Texas.

EarthKind roses are certainly not immune to pest problems. However, their tolerance to pests is so great that they rarely require the use of chemical pesticides.

Only a few roses have received the EarthKind designation. However the list continues to grow as new selections meet the rigorous criteria. Find the list on the link <http://earthkindroses.tamu.edu>.

## **Earth Kind Plant Selector:**

Unlike EarthKind roses plants in this selector haven't gone through rigorous statewide testing and evaluation by a team of horticultural experts. The EarthKind Plant Selector can be an extremely useful tool for this difficult task. This searchable database provides users with the opportunity to select plant materials based on factors such as height, width, flower color, sun or shade, bloom period, leaf character, as well as several other matching criteria.

Each plant in the database is also rated for heat tolerance, drought tolerance, pest tolerance, soil requirement and fertility requirement. The EarthKind Index value (which ranges from 1 - 10) is a measurement based on all 5 of these resource efficiency categories. The higher the number, the more resource efficient a plant is. Plants with an EK Index value of 8 or higher are considered to be extremely resource efficient and are generally heat tolerant, drought tolerant, pest tolerant, with minimal soil or fertility requirements for the selected area (based on ZIP code). These plants with an EK Index value of 8 or higher will grow and perform well without a lot of care, in our Ellis County conditions. Find these plants listed on the link <http://earthkind.tamu.edu/EKSelector.html>

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## What is Texas Superstar?

Today's homeowners and gardening enthusiasts are often bewildered by the deluge of new plants introduced into the marketplace each year. Although glowing promotional descriptions of these new plants make them sound like heaven on earth, important questions concerning their ability to grow in our climate remain unanswered.

The Texas A&M CEMAP team (Coordinated Education and Marketing Assistance Program), composed of horticultural researchers and Extension specialists and agents, are constantly searching for outstanding plants specifically adapted to Texas. Through creation of one of the largest horticultural field trial systems of any university in the nation, these professionals evaluate plants across the state.

This rigorous testing program usually requires three years of trials for an annual flower and up to eight years for a new woody plant. Once testing has been completed, only the truly outstanding plants, those which consistently delivered the highest levels of landscape and garden performance, coupled with the widest range of adaptation and the strongest pest resistance, are designated Texas Superstars. Two to four new Texas Superstars are announced each year.

Plants receiving the Texas Superstar designation are identified to consumers with the trademarked Texas Superstar name and logo on plant labels in the pots and on large nursery display posters.

Using Texas Superstar plants increases the consumer's chances for gardening success and helps to further beautify and protect the Texas environment, because a few cents for the sale of each label is returned to A&M to fund additional research. See a list of the Superstars at the link <http://texassuperstar.com>.

### *Lilium lancifolium*, Tiger lily

<b>Plant type:</b>	bulb	<b>Hardiness:</b>	Zone 4 to 9
<b>Flowers:</b>	clusters of black-spotted, orange lily flowers	<b>Soil:</b>	well-drained
<b>Foliage:</b>	upright spikes	<b>Exposure:</b>	full sun
<b>Mature height:</b>	3 to 6 ft	<b>Water usage:</b>	low
		<b>Sources:</b>	mail order/ retail



**T**iger lilies to me are in the "oldie but goody" category of pass-along plants. This summer-flowering classic shines in the mixed perennial border. The black-spotted, shining orange flowers appear in the hottest part of the summer like flaming torches. If you are into hot colors, then this plant is a must.

And if you were under the impression that lilies are soft and tender plants that need babying and could never survive in our Texas climate, you would be absolutely wrong. Tiger lilies relish our summer heat and erratic weather. Plants will return each year larger and taller with more spikes of flowers.

If you have a friend with one of these wonderful plants in his border, you can easily snag one for yourself. Just take one of the hundreds of bulblets formed in each leaf axil and plant 2" to 3" deep in your garden in well-drained soil. If you aren't lucky enough to have a friend with a tiger in his garden, then you can purchase the bulbs in the fall from numerous online sources; just make sure that they are identified as *Lilium lancifolium*. Not all black-spotted, orange-flowered lilies are the same. You want the original species. A good source is Yucca Do Nursery right here in Texas - [www.yuccado.com/displayone.php?ytitle=Lilium%20lancifolium](http://www.yuccado.com/displayone.php?ytitle=Lilium%20lancifolium). Occasionally you can find tiger lilies at local retail nurseries, growing in containers.



Tiger lilies do best in full sun and must have well-drained soil. If you aren't naturally blessed with the drainage, then dig in some expanded shale to help out. The first year after planting you may get only one small flower spike, but every year after that, more spikes appear with more flowers. I love this plant mixed with bright chartreuse foliage and dark purple flowers. Tiger lilies also mix well with perennial grasses, adding some much-needed color to their foliage.

Grab a tiger by the bulb and add some bright orange to your summer border this year. If you'd like to see them in person, visit the Dallas Arboretum and see them in the Lay Ornamental Garden.

About the author: Jimmy Turner is the director of horticulture research at the Dallas Arboretum. Visit <http://www.dallasplanttrials.org/> for information on his trials. For more plant profiles by Jimmy, subscribe to Neil Sperry's GARDENS Magazine.



## Rose Verbena 'Homestead Purple'

*Glandularia canadensis*

Since its commercial introduction in the early 1990s, this hardy heirloom verbena has drawn much popularity and attention to itself and the entire genus. Legend has it that Alan Armitage and Dr. Michael Dirr spotted this perennial on a trip back from Athens while they were horticulture professors at the University of Georgia. They inquired with the owner of the property, who shared cuttings of it with them, and it went on to become the now-famous 'Homestead Purple' verbena widely available in garden centers and via mail order. It is most likely a cross of *Verbena canadensis* with another species.

It is hardy to at least zone 6 or 7, although the deadly combination of wet soil and freezing temperatures can kill it. When it's happy, it will easily spread up to three feet across, and stay no more than ten inches tall, covered in masses of deep purple flowers, and thrive even in drought conditions.

Type of plant:	Perennials
Bloom color:	Pink, Violet/Lavender
Bloom time of year:	Late Spring/Early Summer, Mid Summer, Late Summer/Early Fall
Sun requirements:	Full Sun
Cold hardiness:	Zone 6a to Zone 9b
Height:	6-12 in.
Spacing:	6-9 in. , 18-24 in. , 24-36 in. , 36-48 in.

## Featured Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener



*Ratibida columnifera* (Nutt)  
Sunflower Family (Asteraceae)

### Mexican Hat

Zone: 2-10  
Size: 1 - 4 ft.  
Blooms: February-July, perennial

Mexican hat is perhaps the most easily identified of all the wildflowers. Its "sombrero", an elongated disk sometimes two inches high, sets Mexican hat apart from other coneflowers. The disk/column is gray-green at first, turning brown as it matures. Its base is surrounded by drooping, velvety petals. Petal color varies from all yellow to all red-brown, or assorted mixtures of red-brown painted on a yellow petal. The lacy foliage is deeply divided into almost thread-like segments. Leaves up to six inches alternate up slender stems, but the top third of the stem is bare, accenting the flower head.

## The 2009 Ellis County Master Gardener's EXPO is set for Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>

Anyone wishing to become a sponsor of the 2009 EXPO, can find additional information on our website: [www.ECMGA.com](http://www.ECMGA.com) or contact James Kocian at 972-814-0699, or email James at [expo.ecmga@yahoo.com](mailto:expo.ecmga@yahoo.com).

## Garden Checklist for December

Submitted by Diane Hopkins  
Ellis County Master Gardener



**D**r. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist, Texas Cooperative Extension, A&M University, recommends the following garden checklist for this month.

- Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't over-water. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and open doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.
- Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.
- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- December through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs.
- Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus.
- Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- Plant those spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.
- Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.

## Blooming Gifts for the Holidays

By Diane Hopkins, Ellis County Master Gardener

**A**s the holiday shopping frenzy kicks off this week you can avoid crowded malls by visiting your local nursery and selecting beautiful blooming gifts for friends and family. A blooming plant will bring wonderful color and cheer during gloomy winter weather.

These are some of the recommended blooming beauties that anyone would be glad to receive.

- **African Violets** stay small and don't mind low-light conditions. Water only when the soil feels dry and be sure to keep water off the foliage.
- **Begonias** are another great flowering houseplant. They grow best in bright light. Keep soil evenly moist but never let the plant sit in water. Fertilize with a diluted strength liquid fertilizer every other week. Pinch out the tips of the branches to create a bushier growth pattern.
- **Cyclamens** thrive in cool, humid conditions. Water when dry and avoid getting water on the crown of the plant. Stop watering when blooms fade. Begin watering again when new growth appears, in about two to three months. Feed with a low-nitrogen fertilizer every couple of weeks.
- **Azaleas** prefer cool conditions where daytime temperatures remain around 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep soil moist by submerging the pot in a bucket or sink full of water, and wait until air bubbles disappear. Allow excess water to drain completely. Feed with water-soluble fertilizer once every two weeks after flowering is finished.
- **Orchids** like bright light during winter months and high humidity. Because they don't grow in typical potting soil, water thoroughly and allow to drain completely. Feed every couple of weeks with a fertilizer specific to orchids following the usage directions.
- **Kalanchoe** need to be placed in a sunny, dry location with daytime temperatures in the 70's. Water when the soil begins to feel dry. It's important to fertilize with a water-soluble fertilizer high in phosphorus.
- **Christmas Cactus** is a tropical plant that prefers cool temperatures and moist soil. Fertilize with a balanced houseplant fertilizer when the plant is in bloom. The more light they get the more blooms they will produce.
- **Amaryllis** needs at least four hours of indirect light a day and will need to be staked, they will become top heavy as they grow. These beauties require a weekly watering.
- **Poinsettias** are another tropical that requires bright light and temperatures in the low 70's. Water when dry and allow the water to drain from the pot. If there is a foil or plastic cover on the pot remove it when watering.

## What's Happening in December?

**Sunday, December 7 10:30 - 5:30 Christmas Workshop, PART 2.** It all begins with a brunch...m-m-m-m...and ends with lots of fun! We will be doing entertainment ideas, baking, wreaths, candles, and more.....The cost is \$95.00. Space is limited so if you want to join us, please let me know ASAP! Presented by Garden Inspirations, Donelle Simmons, 214-566-6862. For more info go to [www.gardeninspirations-tx.com](http://www.gardeninspirations-tx.com) or email [duchess@gardeninspirations-tx.com](mailto:duchess@gardeninspirations-tx.com).

**Cedar Ridge Preserve**-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. To view the General Rules and Regulations from the Dallas County Park and Open Space Program, click here. 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, December 20, 9:00 - noon**, Conservation in Action Workday

**Description:** Come and join in the fun as we work in the butterfly garden and on the trails, and perform other chores. Water and snacks will be provided. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support, bug and sun protection, and bring gloves if you have them, though we will also have some available. Bring a friend! **More info:** [volunteers@audubondallas.org](mailto:volunteers@audubondallas.org) or 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 [jevvarnum@aol.com](mailto:jevvarnum@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 [jevvarnum@aol.com](mailto:jevvarnum@aol.com) or 214-543-2055. Please RSVP if you are bringing a group.

### **For Sale - Wildflower seeds and seedling trees**

The Ellis-Prairie Soil and Water Conversation District is offering its annual wildflower seed and seedling tree program.

With the wildflower seeds, two mixes and bluebonnets are available in 1-pound packages.

"These 1-pound packages make excellent Christmas gifts," a spokesman said. With the seedling tree program, several evergreen and hardwood species are available for conservation plantings.

For more information, contact the district office 1822 FM 66, Suite 102, Waxahachie, or call 972-937-2600, ext. 3.



## When the weather cools down...What do I do?

By Carolyn Foster  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Well, there is a chill in the air; what do I do now? When the weather cools down and you long for some blooms, **THINK CAMELLIAS!** Camellias are native to Asia and come in over 3,000 varieties with showy blooms in reds, pink or whites. *Sasanqua* camellias bloom from October to January, while *Japonica* varieties, which have larger, fuller flowers will bloom from October to April. Hurry to your favorite nursery because Camellias are selling fast.



Plant Camellias during their dormant period, which is October through March. Most Camellias are heavy budded and flower during their dormant period. Camellias bloom best and thrive when protected from hot sun and drying winds. They prefer filtered shade on the north or east side of you house. Camellias need well-drained, acid soil rich in organic material. 50% peat moss and 50% soil mixture works well. In heavy clay soil, plant the top of the root ball 3" above existing soil level. Water with a "root stimulator" solution and repeat at 14-day intervals for the first 2 months.

Water them regularly, especially during warm, dry weather. Keep the root area moist but not soggy. A deep leaching will flush the soil of alkaline salts. Feed lightly once a month after the blooming period with Azalea, Camellia and Gardenia food until blooming begins next season. When temperatures cool, think **MULCH!** Now is a good time to turn the soil in your beds. The old mulch will enrich the existing soil. Put a new layer of mulch on plants for protection and as a finish bed dressing.

The best time to prune them is right after the flowering period. Remove dead or weak wood and thin when dense growth will not allow flowers to properly open. Also, de-bud when you notice small or poorly developed flowers. Carefully twist off excess buds, leaving no more than 2 flowers in each cluster. Be careful not to confuse oval flower buds with long, slender leaf buds. Camellias have few pests. Aphids or spider mites can affect them. Scale can be treated with dormant oil. Then just sit back and enjoy the beauty.

