



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



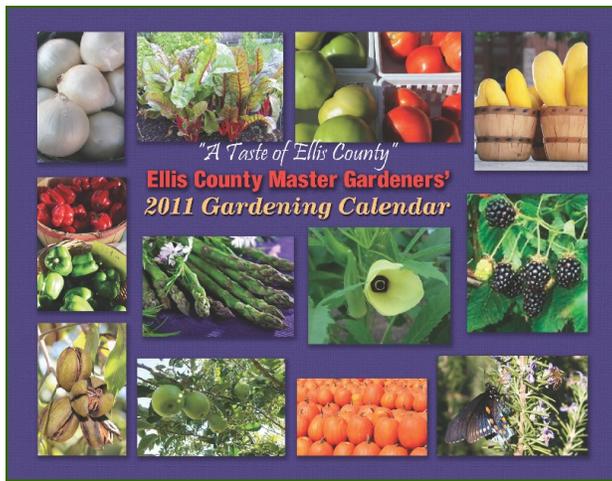
Volume IV, Issue 11

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

December, 2010

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, 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

THE 2011 GARDENING CALENDAR IS HERE!



More details
on page
three

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

The much awaited fifth annual Ellis County Master Gardeners' Calendar is here and it's...FREE...from the following sponsors:

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| | Waxahachie Civic Center |
| | Waxahachie Daily Light |

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This calendar would not be possible without them!**

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What's Happening in December

Garden Inspirations, 108 Ridge Crest Dr., Waxahachie, (214) 497-3918
marilyn@gardeninspirations-tx.com

* PLEASE NOTE: Marilyn regrets to announce the Christmas Open House is cancelled on Monday, December 20.

SATURDAY, December 18, 9:00 AM - noon Cedar Ridge Preserve—Conservation in Action Workday

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 and bring gloves if you have them, though we will also have some available. Bring a friend!

Location - Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas 75229.

Information - www.audubondallas.org

November 26-January 2 Celebrate the holiday season at the Dallas Arboretum with Holiday at the Arboretum 'The Magic of Santa'.

For more information, visit http://www.dallasarboretum.org/special_events/MagicOfSanta.htm or call 214-515-6500. Open daily 9am - 5pm, closed Christmas Day and New Years Day.

Location: The Dallas Arboretum, 8525 Garland Road, Dallas, Texas 75218

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton

Ellis County Master Gardener



December Herb of the Month: Juniper Berry

Juniper, (*Juniperus communis*) is an evergreen shrub common throughout North America. The "berry" is not a true berry, but the female seed cone with unusually fleshy scales, which give it a berry-like appearance. Male and female flowers occur on separate plants, but only the female flowers produce berries. Most juniper species grow edible berries, but some are too bitter to eat. Warning: some species, such as *J. sabina*, are toxic and consumption is inadvisable. The cones from *Juniperus communis*, or common juniper, are used as a spice in northern European cuisine to add a sharp, clear flavor to game marinade, wild birds, and other meat dishes. Juniper berries are commonly used in sauerkraut and various German, Austrian, Czech, and Hungarian dishes.

Commercially, juniper berries flavor gin, a liquor developed in the 17th century in the Netherlands. If you have ever enjoyed a gin and tonic, you have sampled the flavor of juniper. To harvest the berries, pick them fully matured in the fall and allow them to dry slowly, this can take six months or longer, then store in a tightly sealed container in a dark, cool cabinet or pantry. Or you can order a small quantity from your favorite herb and spice shop. The berries lose their flavor quickly, so don't purchase more than you will use in a short time.

During the Christmas holidays, juni-

per branches are brought into the home for decoration. Their piney, aromatic leaves add a fresh cedar scent and are used to make garlands and wreaths. Some juniper trees are mistakenly given the common name "cedar," including *J. virginiana*, the red cedar that is used in cedar drawers and chests. An essential oil extracted from juniper berries is used in aromatherapy and perfumes.

Juniper berries have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs including the tomb of Tutankhamen. The berries probably came from



(Continued on page 5)

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



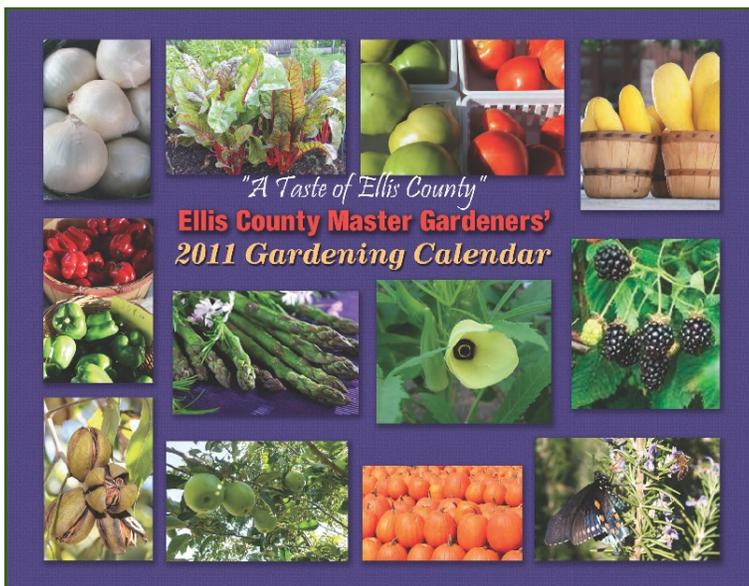
A. ericoides, *Aster* spp.
Sunflower Family (Asteraceae)

White Aster

Range: 1-5, 7 (Ellis County is range 4)
Size: 1-4 feet
Blooms: August through December, perennial

Identifying wild asters by species may be baffling to the amateur naturalist and it often challenges the professional. One authority states that Texas has forty-five species. There are at least six wild blue asters, ranging from blue-white, blue, violet, and lavender to purple. The many-petaled flowers range in size from a half-inch to two inches. Center disks are yellow. Flowers on the upper stems are profuse. Most asters are fall-blooming and an important source of late-season nectar for butterflies. A tea made from cured roots of the plant was used by Indians to stop diarrhea. Asters can be seen along edges of woods, on prairies and along fence rows, where they grow in clay, sand, or gravelly soils.

Master Gardeners 2011 Gardening Calendar



The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our fifth annual Gardening Calendar. Our theme this year is "A Taste of Ellis County". With home gardening becoming more prevalent, we thought it would be a nice change from our flowers and plants, to concentrate on vegetables, berries, and fruit and nut trees that do well in our Ellis County landscape. Each month's calendar represents one of these items. As always, the calendar will include month-by-month gardening information, soil preparation, and fertilizing timelines. This year our "gardening tips" will furnish you with the vitamin and mineral content of each month's selection.

Your free copy will be available by **December 10th** at one of our many calendar sponsors. Please thank them for sponsoring this year's gardening calendar. Without their support, there would be no calendar.

Hardy Souls

By: Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



It's transition time across Texas. This is the season to replace those worn-out summer annuals with plants that will survive our comparatively mild winter weather and still keep on blooming. Our nurseries are alive with color inviting us in.

Pansies and violas are the most winter-hardy of the cool season annuals. They've been fall landscaping mainstays ever since most of us have been gardening in Texas. Planted from 4-inch pots, they'll bloom the rest of the fall, during winter warm spells, and well into mid-spring. For this reason, they are the best-selling plant in Texas. For the record, small flowering pansies or violas produce many more flowers per plant, so their overall show in the landscape will generally be much better than the giant-flowering series. Also, a bed of one color of pansy or viola, whichever color you choose, will show up better from a distance than a mixed color planting. The best performers in the Dallas Arboretum trials are the 'Nature' and 'Panola' series of pansies. These compact plants with 2 1/2 inch flowers come in many colors. Violas are better performers for me; the violas spring back quicker after a hard freeze and continue to bloom further into the heat of summer. Plant for plant, they deliver more flower power than the pansies. The best va-

rieties are the 'Sorbet' series, 'Penny' series, and the 'Skippy XL' series.

Pinks or Dianthus are the next most winter-hardy. These carnation relatives are one of our favorite fall and winter annuals because they love our alkaline soil. These compact plants have a rich clove-like aroma. Reds, pinks, whites, and orchids are the predominate colors. There are many choices, but the varieties that have performed best at the Dallas Arboretum are the 'Elation', 'Telstar', and 'Floral Lace' series. If you are looking for a taller one, look for the 2 foot tall 'Amazon' series.

Snapdragons are of the same cold hardiness as pinks. Dwarf and intermediate types do well in garden settings, since they will support the weight of their flower stems without staking. A favorite dwarf variety is the 'Chimes' series at 10 inches; something a little taller is the 'La Bella' series at 18 to 20 inches. Want something even taller? Look for the 'Liberty' and 'Sonnet' series which get 2 to 2 1/2 feet tall with large spikes of flowers (the taller the spike—the longer the bloom period). Again, plant in beds of one color for the greatest impact.

Flowering cabbage and flowering kale are at the next level down in winter-hardiness. Their bold leaves come in shades of rose, pink, white, and green. Kale leaves are more frilled, some are lacey, while the leaves of flowering cabbage are fuller and more rounded. The garden isn't always about flowers; the ornamental foliage of flowering cabbage and flowering kale can be just as spectacular, making it indispensable to the winter landscape. To make a statement, look for these TALL plants to use in the back of your bed or in containers. Three feet tall 'Red Bor' is an absolute favorite with deep burgundy foliage lasting from early fall until April. 'Feather' and 'Peacock' kale both form large rosettes of deep red and white colored leaves that can reach 3 feet across. All kale are heavy feeders so fertilize them a couple of times over the season. Plant these this fall if you decide to use them, since they tend to bolt into unattractive flower stalks come warm weather.

Cardoon has been used as the thriller in many container plantings at the arboretum. This relative of the edible globe artichoke is guaranteed to get your neighbors talking. The silvery arching foliage will form a clump 3 feet across during the winter, and in the spring, large, bright blue, thistle-

(Continued on page 8)



**Interested in becoming a
2011 Expo Sponsor Or
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Contact James Kocian at
expo.ecmga@yahoo.com

Reserve the date: March 26, 2011!

Master Naturalists Graduate First Class

Got questions about nature? The Indian Trail chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program has completed its first classroom training sessions and has accepted community projects to help preserve our natural heritage.

The second annual 10-week training program will begin Saturday, March 19. The program and study manual of tools and resources for conserving our natural assets is sponsored by Texas Agrilife Extension Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Ten weekend classes and field trips of required training in wildlife and natural resource management are taught by recognized experts. Topics are customized to focus on the native ecosystems of North Central Texas and Ellis County. Advanced training is also available in special subjects that interest you.

Applications are available online at <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/>, by contacting the Agrilife Extension Office at (972) 825-5175, or e-mail Ellis-Texas@tamu.edu.

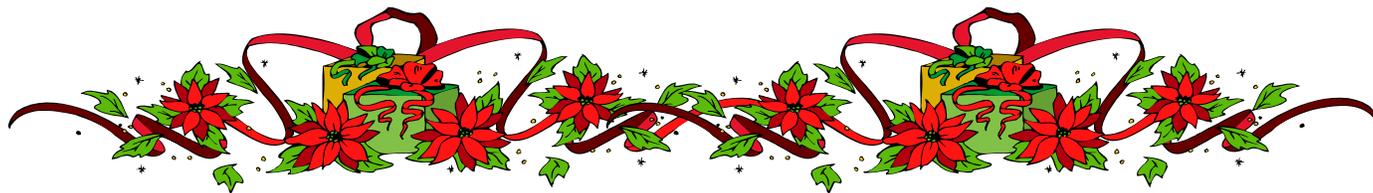
"We are delighted to offer this program about our natural resources through education and active participation," said



Linda Moxley, president of the new Indian Trail chapter.

"Not only is this a fun activity for citizens, but it is a perfect place to talk to knowledgeable people about our local ecosystems from the soil to the birds in the air. In return for this training, you provide your community with at least 40 hours of volunteer services per year in the form of educational activities and projects."

The classroom location is First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Ave., in Waxahachie. Classes are limited to 20 students and applications are due by February 15.



Herb of the Month (Continued from page 2)

Greece and were used as a medicine long before they were mentioned as a food. The Romans used juniper berries as a cheap domestically-produced substitute for the expensive black pepper and long pepper, imported from India.

Common juniper grows wild and

many of the cultivars are popular in the Southern landscape. Junipers vary in size and shape from trees 20 to 40 feet tall, to columnar or low spreading shrubs with long trailing branches. They are evergreen with needle-like or scale-like leaves.

While visiting my former hometown, Webster Groves, Missouri, last

month, I was involved with an herbal festival. One of the items for sale was a "Juniper Berry Foot Bath". Each muslin packet contained Epsom salts, juniper berries, and baking soda with in-

structions to fill a basin with several inches of warm water, add the contents and soak your feet for several minutes. Seems like a perfect way to finish a day of holiday shopping.

A quick search through my German cookbooks and Williamsburg recipes found juniper berries listed as ingredients in Sauerbraten, Roasted Pork, Roast Venison with Red Wine Sauce, Pheasant with Stuffing, Steamed Spiced Sauerkraut, Carrot and Potato Bake, as well as, many stews and slow roasting dishes. So, if there is a hunter in the family or you enjoy hearty meals, give juniper berries a try.





Landscape Gardening

By: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a website at 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.

Christmas Cactus

by Cynthia W. Mueller, Master Gardener, Galveston County

The Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) is a favorite holiday season house plant, but one which needs careful attention to details if it is to live and flower again the next year. It is closely related to Easter Cactus (*Schlumbergera gaertneri*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncatus*), all with fleshy, flattened, segmented joints and showy flowers ranging in color from white through pink, red, and purple. These are cacti, which in nature live in the crotches of jungle trees, and benefit from light, porous soil mixed with leafmold and sand.

When the flowering period is finished, an active growth period will commence. Keep the plant in a sheltered place until danger of freezing is over. Water carefully, keeping in mind that overwatering is the major cause of failure with Christmas cactus. Soak the potting medium when watering, then allow the plant to become almost dry before watering again. When the plant is put outside during warmer weather, it will be easier to keep if placed on a porch, or in a situation where it will not be soaked with rainwater over a period of several days. Fertilize with a water-soluble 20-20-20 fertilizer with trace elements while in an active growth stage. Occasionally, leach out excess fertilizer salts with plain water.

Christmas Cactus will thrive in a well-drained, sterile potting medium, high in organic material. A little sand may be mixed with the medium to provide

weight, important as the cactus increases in size. A pH of 5.5 to 6.2 is considered optimum for growth.

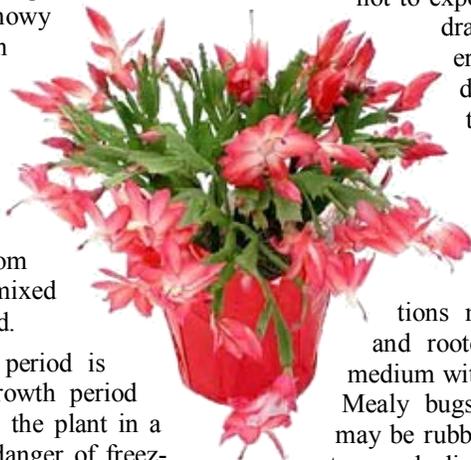
Although a temperature of 70-80°F during the growing season is considered ideal, plants will tolerate Texas-type temperatures in the 90-100°F range, although growth may be slower. Reduce water and fertilizer in August in preparation for the beginning of bud development, which is regulated by the shortening of fall days, along with cooler night temperatures. By late October and early November, buds should be in evidence. Help to maintain bud set by adequate watering, taking care

not to expose the plant to cold drafts, unvented heaters, or rough handling. Night temperatures above 70°F may inhibit bud development.

As the cactus becomes larger, shorter tip portions may be broken off and rooted in loose, sandy medium with very little trouble. Mealy bugs, scale and aphids may be rubbed away with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol. Use stronger controls such as houseplant insecticides only if the infestation appears to be gaining the upper hand. With good tending, Christmas Cactus may live for many years.

Garden Checklist for December

- As soon as the November weather appears to be settled, it is time to select and plant such annuals as pansies, violas and ornamental cabbages and kale.
- Plan now for your spring flowering season with a mixture of annuals and perennials.
- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.



- 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. In addition to ordering seeds that you are already familiar with, try a few new kinds each year to broaden your garden contents.

- November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. In the Panhandle, planting is often delayed until February or early March.

- Bring in late-blooming plants such as decorative kalanchoes or Christmas cactus, so they may finish flowering in the warmth of the house.

- Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.

- Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.

- Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.

- Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so. Be sure to refrigerate tulips and hyacinths for six to eight weeks prior to planting.

- 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 overwater. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.

- Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.

Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues, as well as, good gardening books.



Accepting Applications for Master Gardener Training

Ellis County Master Gardeners are now accepting applications for our 2011 training classes. The training classes are held in Waxahachie each Tuesday and Thursday from 8:30a.m. to 5:00p.m. throughout the month of February. Class attendance is mandatory. Following the classes, 75 hours of community service are required to become a certified master gardener. Cost of classes is \$150.00.

If gardening is your interest and you can commit to 75 hours of community service, please call Ellis County Texas AgriLife Extension Service at (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu. Applications are also available on our website: www.ecmga.com.

The deadline for applications is January 3, 2011. Class size is limited.

Planning for Next Year

*By Carolyn Foster
Ellis County Master Gardener*

Slow Down...Catch Up!

This month we can slow down and catch up. Remove any dead planting material from the beds. Feed new winter annuals to promote vigorous growth during warm spells with a water-soluble 20-20-20 fertilizer. Apply a thick layer of mulch around shrubs and perennials. Cover plants that are cold-sensitive during extremely cold spells. Remember, NO PLASTIC! Apply root stimulator to newly-dug and transplanted trees and shrubs.

Spring Bulbs

You can still plant spring-flowering bulbs such as daffodils and grape hyacinths this month. Tulips and hyacinths can be planted once soil temps drop below 50° for three consecutive days. Vegetable bin chilling for 45 days prior improves flowering. Plant berry producers for mid-winter color such as hollies, nandinas, and pyracanthas. You can also plant pecan and fruit trees, grape and blackberry vines, and asparagus roots. The best time to transplant established landscape plants is during winter dormancy, after the first freeze.

Pruning for Summer

Now is a good time to prune summer-flowering shrubs and vines. But, don't prune spring-blooming flowers until after they bloom in the spring. Remove seed heads and winter die-back on the Crape myrtle between December and February. Prune evergreen shrubs limb-by-limb to retain natural form. Prune grapevine canes now to train growth. Remove mistletoe while young (less than a year old). There is not a good chemical control.

Plants of the Month

Poinsettias

The bracts are the colored portion of the plant and the flowers are the yellow centers. Buy plants with dense, plentiful foliage to the soil line. Place in indirect sunlight and room temperatures between 65° – 70°; water when soil is dry to the touch and feed when in bloom.

Camellias

They have a heavy bud-set and flower now, even though they are dormant. Camellias bloom best when protected from hot sun and drying winds. They prefer rich organic, acid soils. Feed lightly once a month after blooming.



It's December...What Needs to be Done?



Agarita (*Berberis trifoliolata*)
Photo by Linda Moxley

In late winter and early spring, clusters of lemon-yellow flowers accent the spiny, holly-like leaves. By May, bright red, edible berries cover the heat-tolerant, cold-hardy shrubs. Their ornamental evergreen leaves, fragrant flowers, and abundant berries make them a premier landscape specimen plant or, because of their prickly leaves, a security hedge. They are at home in our alkaline soil and grow to a height of 3-6 feet.

Hardy Souls (Continued from page 4)

like flowers appear. Sometimes difficult to find in the nurseries, it is well worth the hunt.

All of these plants will do well in Ellis County. On an extremely cold winter night, covering them with a lightweight landscape fabric or an old blanket will gain you several degrees of protection. Plastic is never a good option, as it will do more harm than good.

I'm always invigorated when visiting the Dallas Arboretum. I especially like attending presentations highlighting what grows best in our difficult climate and black clay soil. If you can't make it to the arboretum, check out dallasplant-trials.org.

Planting and Sowing

- Plant pre-chilled tulip and hyacinth bulbs promptly after removing from the refrigerator. Other spring-flowering bulbs can also be planted.
- Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to attract birds to your landscape and for winter color. Some good choices are: possumhaw holly, yaupon holly, Carolina buckthorn, rusty blackhaw viburnum, American beautyberry, coral-berry, mahonias, and junipers.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Prune trees, including live oaks and red oaks, as well as shrubs, to remove broken and unwanted branches, or to limb up (raise the canopy to allow more light underneath).
- Do not top crape myrtles or the central leader of any shade tree.
- Apply a root stimulator, such as liquid seaweed, or a high phosphate fertilizer to newly planted trees and shrubs.

Garden Watch

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight freeze cloth, which is available at most nurseries and garden centers.
- Continue to water, as needed, lawns and newly planted trees, shrubs, and perennials, if rainfall is insufficient.
- Remove hoses from faucets to avert freeze damage inside your house.

This and That

- The dormant season is a good time to access and plan landscape changes for the coming year.
- Create a wildlife friendly landscape that attracts birds, bees, and butterflies, as well as, other creatures by planting a diversity of Texas native and adapted trees, shrubs, and perennials. Choose among an array of drought tolerant, sustainable plants and those with EarthKind© and Texas Superstar designations.
- Contact your local County AgriLife Office for more information.

Tips for Turf

Aerate your turf areas twice yearly to permit the roots to grow strong and deep. Not only will your yard be healthier and more attractive, but will hold the soil better, reduce watering needs, and require less maintenance.

Last night, there came a frost, which has done great damage to my garden....

It is sad that Nature will play such tricks on us poor mortals, inviting us with sunny smiles to confide in her, and then, when we are entirely within her power, striking us to the heart.

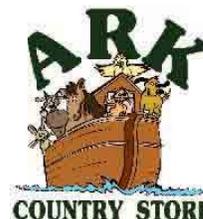
**~Nathaniel Hawthorne,
The American Notebooks**



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Merry Christmas