



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



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

What's Happening in February

Lighthouse for Learning

With the Ellis County Master Gardeners and AgriLife Extension
For reservations, call Melissa Cobb, (972) 923-4631, ext. 142.

Monday, February 21, 6-7:30 – *“Getting Started with Roses”*, Instructor Jim Suggs, cost: \$12.00. An introduction to roses; including site selection, soil preparation, plant selection, insects, diseases, water and fertilizer requirements, and pruning.

Monday, February 28, 6-7:30 – *“Vegetable Gardening 101”*, Instructor Susan Norvell, cost: \$12.00. In this class, you will learn the basics of vegetable gardening including planning, location, soil condition, and Ellis County plant selections.

Monday, March 7, 6-7:30 – *“Culinary Herbs”*, Instructor Arlene Hamilton, cost: \$12.00. Learn which herbs grow best in Texas, which love our hot summers and those that prefer the cooler fall, winter and spring seasons.

Monday, March 28, 6-7:30 – *“Backyard Pond Building Basics”*, Instructor Scherle Barth, cost: \$12.00. This class will go beyond basic book information with the where, what, how and when of planning for a water feature.

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. Learn the basics of plant propagation, increasing and multiplying plants for the house, landscape and garden. Hands-on experience in the WISD HS Greenhouse.

Monday, April 25, 6-7:30 – *“Growing Texas Natives”*, Instructor Monica Nyenhuis, cost: \$12.00. Learn about Texas natives and adapted plants that thrive in our hot summers and wet winters.

Tuesday, February 15 - Application Deadline for next **Ellis County Master Naturalist** training program. Applications are available online at <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/> or by contacting the AgriLife Extension Office at (972) 825-5175 or email: Ellis-Texas@tamu.edu.

Saturday, February 19, 10 a.m. - **Larken Farm's Tree Pruning Class**, 3653 Greathouse Rd., Waxahachie, TX. For more information, call (972) 938-7150.

(Continued on page 2)



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>February-What's Happening</i>	1
<i>Herb of the Month</i>	2
<i>February Wildflower</i>	3
<i>News from the Greenhouse</i>	4
<i>In the Vegetable Garden</i>	5
<i>Spring Will Be Here...</i>	5
<i>Landscape Gardening</i>	6
<i>What Needs to be Done?</i>	8
<i>Attention Birders!</i>	9

Herb of the Month

By *Arlene Hamilton*
Ellis County Master Gardener



2011 Herb of the Year: Horseradish!

Annually, the International Herb Association declares an "Herb of the Year" and encourages those of us who enjoy herbs to expand our knowledge and use of a particular plant. The 2011 Herb of the Year is **Horseradish**, so get ready for some sinus clearing, flavor boosting, spicy tastings.

Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*, syn. *Cochlearia armoracia*) is a perennial plant of the Brassicaceae family, which also includes mustard, radish, wasabi, broccoli, and cabbages. The plant is probably native to southeastern Europe and western Asia, but is popular around the world today. It grows up to five feet tall and is mainly cultivated for its large white, tapered root. The leaves are a rich, dark green and the blooms are big, white spikes in early spring.

The intact horseradish root has hardly any aroma. When cut or grated, however, enzymes from the damaged plant cells break

down sinigrin (a glucosinolate) to produce mustard oil which irritates the sinuses, and eyes. Once grated, if not used immediately or mixed in vinegar, the root darkens, loses its pungency, and becomes unpleasantly bitter when exposed to air and heat.

In 1869, John Henry Heinz made horseradish sauce from one of his mother's recipes, bottled it, and one of the first condiments began sales in the United States. Today, most horseradish is grown in the Northeast and Midwest areas of the United States. Collinsville, Illinois refers to itself as the horseradish capital of the world. This St. Louis suburb has an annual festival that includes food, exhibits, a root toss, Bloody Mary contest, a Little Miss Horseradish pageant, and other competitions. This year's festival is June 4th

and 5th.

Horseradish is an herbaceous perennial in hardiness zones 5-9 and can be grown as

an annual in other zones, though not as successfully. Zones with both a long growing season and winter temperatures cold enough to ensure plant dormancy are preferable. Also, horseradish does not do well in clay soil, so the beds need to be worked with lots of manure and compost to provide the light, loamy conditions needed for good root production.



Freshly-dug root photo by Susan Belsinger

Potash is an important nutrient for success in growing horseradish. In North Texas, planting in containers is preferred. Choose a deep pot as the root

(Continued on page 3)

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN FEBRUARY (Continued from page 1)

Saturday, February 19, 9 a.m. - noon Conservation in Action Workday - Cedar Ridge Preserve

Sunday, February 27, 1 p.m. - Trout Lily Walk with Jim Varnum - Cedar Ridge Preserve

Location - Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas 75229. Information - www.audubondallas.org

Events at The Greenery (Please note: Dates have changed)

3708 North Highway 77, Waxahachie. Call (972) 617-5459 or visit www.thegreenerytx.com for more information.

Saturday, February 19, 9 a.m. to ? (Preview Thurs., 2/17 & Fri., 2/18) **All-Day Auction**, catering by Cici's Pizza.

Saturday, February 26, Begins at 9 a.m. Organic Day at The Greenery, Door prizes all day. Classes on organic products, raised beds, birding and companion planting will be offered. Pre-paid lunch available.

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

Vegetable Garden Class Series, offered Mon. mornings Feb. 21 - Mar. 21, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. or Mon. evenings Feb 21 - March 14, 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. This four-week series on vegetable gardening is designed especially for Ellis County and the Dallas Metroplex. Pre-payment of \$225 will pay for all classes and a detailed vegetable gardening manual.

Signing up for Vegetables In Partnership Local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)

Baskets will always include fresh herbs and locally grown, freshly harvested, seasonal vegetables. Starting mid-March and continuing through July. Contact Marilyn for more information.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Missouri Violet *Viola missouriensis* Green **Violet Family (Violaceae)**

Size: 3-10 inches
Blooms: February-April, Perennial
Range: 1-5, 7-8, 10 (Ellis Co. is range 4)

Members of the violet family are not hard to identify as a group. Common features are a flat, lower petal that frequently is lined to attract and direct insects to the nectar, two-side petals and two upper petals. Identification by species is almost impossible because they hybridize freely in nature. Missouri violet has

the largest range of the nineteen Texas species and is the one most likely to be seen. Flower color varies from pale to dark blue. Twenty to thirty leaves spread from a single crown. They are long-stalked and somewhat heart-shaped. Missouri violet is usually found growing in forested or riparian woodland areas, in partial shade. Most other species found in the state are restricted to east Texas.



Herb of the Month (Continued from page 2)

will want 18 to 24 inches of soil that is kept moist, but not wet. Sun in the morning and shade in the summer afternoon is preferred. After the first hard freeze kills the leaves, the root can be dug and divided. The main root is harvested while large offshoots can be replanted to produce next year's crop. Horseradish left undisturbed in the garden spreads via underground shoots and can become invasive. Older roots left in the ground become woody, and are no longer of culinary value. They can be dug and redivided to start new plants. Tender young leaves can be used in salads as you would use any bitter herb. Horseradish can tolerate some pest damage to its leaves, but crucifer weevils, beet leafhoppers, and pathogens that destroy root crops require treatment.

In the kitchen, horseradish asserts its pungent flavor in Bloody Marys, cocktail sauce for shrimp, clams, oysters, and mussels, cream sauce for roast beef and ham, and on the Seder plate for Jewish Passover. The grated root can be mixed

with sour cream, mayonnaise, ketchup, yogurt, cream cheese, mustard, or a combination to make a sauce for almost anything. Try some on sandwiches, baked and mashed potatoes, coleslaw, fresh and baked vegetables, or as a dip with vegetable crudites, crackers or chips.

Having grown up on a Pennsylvania farm in a German-Polish family, horseradish was an important crop and much-loved condiment. A memorable Easter tradition was making beet-horseradish sauce for our Easter ham, homemade kielbasa, and boiled eggs. The recipe has been handed down for many generations and is presently in the hands of my sister and brother-in-law, who go through the ritual preparation annually a week or two before Easter.

No matter the temperature in western Pennsylvania, on the appointed day, John, my brother-in-law, retreats to the back porch with his grater and roots, as a well ventilated area is needed to keep from irritating the nose and eyes. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, my sister Patti is preparing the beets and pickling syrup. All the family eagerly awaits this special treat, filled

with delicious flavor and precious memories.

Krupa - Partsch's Beet Horseradish

6 to 8 pounds fresh beets, scrubbed and greens removed (leave about one inch of green to keep juice from bleeding out)

2 to 3 horseradish roots

2 cups white vinegar

14 tbsp. white sugar (1 cup)

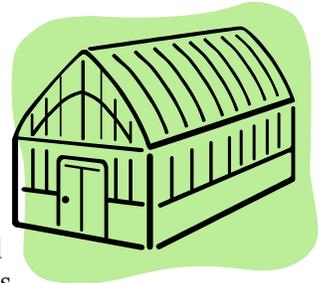
Boil the beets until soft, let cool, peel and grate into a large bowl. Next peel the skin off the horseradish roots. Cut into 4 to 6 inch pieces and grate. Add to the beet mixture. Bring the vinegar and sugar to a boil, dissolving all the sugar. Slowly, stir into the horseradish-beet mixture, tasting as you proceed. Spoon into small, sterilized canning jars. Seal and refrigerate. This will keep several months in the refrigerator. This is not an exact measure of ingredients. Like most recipes handed down through families, tastes vary and the degree of heat desired is an individual option. We are at the mercy of the preparer. In honor of horseradish's status for 2011, I have already told John and Patti that I plan to be with them in mid-April to help with the celebration. 🌿



News from the Greenhouse

By Pat Dockins

Ellis County Master Gardener



Come on sunshine...shine on! Could we please reschedule these rainy days to sometime in the middle of July?

We've got our baby plants at the greenhouse and they love sunshine. And we need lots so we'll be ready for the **Lawn and Garden**



Expo, sponsored by the Ellis County Master Gardeners. The Expo is held at the Waxahachie Convention Center the last Saturday in March from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

This year, in our plant sales department, we will focus on butterfly attracting plants. Some are not easily found, like **Butterfly Weed**, **Frost Weed**, **Butterfly Bush**,



and **Asters**, but are an important source for late-season nectar. We always try to have some drought tolerant plants like **Blackfoot Daisy**, **Verbena**, **Turk's Cap-Big Mama**, **Mexican Oregano** and **Rock Rose**. We'll have **Cedar Sage**, a Texas native that

blooms with red flowers from April to October. Texas native **Callirhoe**, a.k.a. **Winecup**, is a low growing early spring bloomer with blooms that are wine-red. This would look good at the front of a border or cascading over a wall. **Calylophus Primrose** is another Texas native that blooms with yellow flowers in spring and into summer. We'll have plenty of **Coleus**, some **Gregg's Blue Mistflower**, red **Lantana**, and many others.

Roses, we always have. Again this year, we'll have many **Peggy Martin** roses. This is the rose that survived the Katrina hurricane. They are such easy roses to grow. We'll also have some **New Dawn**, a beautiful climber that blooms from spring till fall. **Iceberg** is an old rose with beautiful white blooms and this time in the form of a shrub. We have other old favorites like **Belinda's Dream**, **Lady Banks**, **Marie Pavie**, plus many other varieties.

Naturally, we'll have lots of tomato plants and lots of pepper plants! We'll offer the usual **Better Boy**, **Celebrity**, **Early Girl**, and **Porter**, plus **Sunny Goliath**, a hybrid that pro-

duces a large yellow-gold fruit. It is mild and sweet and bound to be appreciated by those who don't like the highly acidic bite of most red tomatoes. **Cherokee Purple** is new to me. The catalog says it is pink-purple and



is tolerant to mild drought, as well as, to common diseases. We're offering some heirlooms this year, too. **Soldacki** is from Poland and is low in acid and intensely sweet with a thin skin. **Homestead**, is a highly adaptable tomato especially in hot conditions. Fruits are medium to large.

Our peppers will be the old standards. **California Wonder** and **Golden Calwonder** are our bells. For those that want hot, we'll offer **Habanero** and **Jalapeno Goliath**. **Pimiento** and **Sweet Bananas** round out our list of peppers.

You know, when we get our little plants, we've either propagated them ourselves or bought them from a commercial greenhouse, so they are like little babies to us. We hover over them just like a new mother and woe to the poor, little aphid that dares to touch one of our little darlings. Come the last Saturday of March though, when our little ones have grown and are ready to go out into the big world...well, it's like when that last kid leaves home, It sure was wonderful having them, but boy, it's great when they are out on their own!



Interested in becoming a 2011 Expo Sponsor or Expo Exhibitor?

Contact James Kocian at expo.ecmga@yahoo.com

Reserve the date: March 26, 2011!

In the Vegetable Garden
 With Robert Shugart
 Ellis County Master Gardener



Q: When is the time to plant onions and what varieties are recommended?

A: Mid-January to mid-February is the time to plant onion transplants in our area. The recommended "bulb" varieties are: YellowTexas Super-sweet 1015 Y, Red Granex Burgundy, White Crystal Wax, or White Granex. Most local gardeners thin their crops and use these onions for green table onions. Onions are heavy feeders.

Apply four or five pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet to the soil before planting. Onions should be planted about one inch deep. They should be "side dressed" three weeks after planting and



again when bulb enlargement begins with two to three tablespoons of a fertilizer per 10 foot of row. Recent information suggests fertilizer containing sulphur will make onions hotter.

Q: What is a "shallot"?

A: A shallot is a member of the onion family. The plant lives for many years. It is grown for its mild garlic-like roots, made up of segments called cloves. The plants will grow to about 18 inches tall and often have white or violet flowers in the summer

Q: Should I break over the tops of my onion plants to get larger bulbs?

A: Breaking over the tops of onion plants will not increase the bulb size; it may actually

prevent bulb enlargement. Onion bulbs increase in size as sugars manufactured in the tops are translocated to the bulb. If the tops are broken, this process stops, preventing further enlargement of the bulb.

Q: Last year, my onion plants were stunted. When I looked at the roots, they looked purple or pink. What was the problem?

A: This is "pink root" of onions. It is a soil-borne fungus that is most often found in sandy, clay, or wet soils. The only control for the disease is crop rotation. When buying transplants this year, look closely for pink roots on the young plants. If a large percentage of the bunch has it, don't buy them. Most onion transplants are certified to be free of pink root. You can also look for varieties that are resistant to pink root, such as Grano PRR and Granex PRR.

Spring Will Be Here Before You Know It. Are You Ready?

By Susan Norvell
 Ellis County Master Gardener



February is a good month to think about, plan, and prepare your gardens for the spring and summer plantings. Plan ahead and decide what you want to plant, and then order any supplies needed, especially if you purchase from gardening catalogues. This would also be a good time to begin to assess any damage that may have occurred to your landscape due to freezing temperatures. Remember to keep watering your planting areas.

For you vegetable gardeners, if you haven't already done so, now is the time to till your garden and get it ready. Remember, never till wet soil; it will bind up your nutrients and form

clods that will be impossible to break up. If you want to grow onions, get your sets in now. If planting asparagus, use two to three year old roots and plant them in well prepared, permanent locations in your garden. And remember, don't harvest any of the shoots the first year.

Now is the time to sow cool season vegetable seeds directly into your garden soil. You can sow lettuce, radishes, carrots, spinach, beets, chard, turnips, and cucumbers. Cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and potatoes should be planted four weeks before the last average frost date, which is March 15th in Ellis County. If you

need recommendations on the best vegetable varieties for Ellis County, the Agri-Life Extension Office has a complete listing.

For your perennial gardens, consider using native and adapted plants, as they will reduce or eliminate the need for pesticide spraying and heavy fertilization. Plants labeled EarthKind have been tested and proven under all growing conditions, and are very hardy.

Start planting your gladiolus corms

(Continued on page 7)



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.

Winter Weeds

By Cynthia W. Mueller

Winter weeds have a habit of growing while the gardener's back is turned, or while he or she is inside, attempting to keep warm. They are certainly far easier to dispose of if steps are taken to review all areas of the garden on a schedule, eliminating small beginnings before they grow to smother their neighbors.



Seedling Henbit

H e n b i t (*Lamium alexicaule*) is a member of the Mint family, and one of the most common Central Texas weeds, originally

an escape from Europe-Eurasia-North Africa. There are five closely related species. A good clue for recognizing Henbit is the fact that the upper leaves encircle the stem. It is relished by chickens and has been consumed by people as a pot-herb in the past. Another common name is 'Dead-nettle' ("dead" meaning not a stinging nettle).

Henbit has multiple stems from a single taproot, masses of many

soft, slightly hairy leaves, and small flowers that are purple in color. It has been a well known weed in Europe and England for centuries. The early herbalist, John Gerard, wrote of baking henbit flowers with sugar for desserts or serving it in a distilled form.

For gardeners, henbit is undesirable because the many stems can grow to be 6-8 inches

long and sprawl over more desirable plants nearby. Although they may be controlled by pre-emergent herbicides, getting rid of young plants with a hoe is probably the fastest method.

Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*), also known as 'starweed', is a plant that has both good and bad qualities. It is a member of the Caryophyllaceae, or Pink, family. As soon as the soil cools, it appears in the late fall and persists until the hotter days of late spring finally burn it off. It is just as at home in the winter lawn as it is in the flower bed. The plant has weak stems with masses of bright green, shiny leaves and small starry off-white or yellow flowers. Chickweed is extremely tender, and has a tendency to break off as it is pulled up. The tiny, stringy stump is solidly rooted into the ground and will grow back into a vigorous plant while the gardener is not looking. It can be killed with boil-



Henbit

ing water from a teakettle if growing in the cracks between flagstones or bricks in a patio area. If it is not feasible to use pre-emergent herbicide on chickweed, this or hoeing out very small plants are good methods of control.

Although chickweed is annoying to gardeners, it does have good qualities if growing in the proper place in the

garden. Chickweed is edible, and the seed is sometimes sold commercially to market gardeners for the high-dollar restaurant trade. It is considered one of the best foods for baby birds, and this is where chickweed got its name. Canary raisers used to say that if there was no commercial source of birdseed, broods of young canaries could be raised on the greens and seeds of chickweed alone. Gardeners who are interested in supporting local bird life should leave a little chickweed under the edge of a hedge or some similar spot.

Mouse Ear Chickweed

(*Cerastium vulgatum*) is also a member of the Caryophyllaceae (Pink) family, but its texture is coarser and



Chickweed Seedling

the leaves and stems are much tougher and hairy. It also has many petalled, small white star-like flowers, and makes unsightly displays in lawns and flower beds during the winter. This chickweed is also edible, but is less digestible and desirable. The USDA indicates that this plant is present all over the United States, and even in Greenland, and that it might be considered biennial or even perennial in some cases.

Mouse Ear is capable of growing in more exposed parts of the landscape. While ordinary chickweed is only growing in the protection of other plants as the season becomes hotter, Mouse Ear will still be growing out over the sidewalk. It is thought to be a native of Europe.



Mature Chickweed

Catchweed Bedstraw (*Galium aparine*) is one of the most irritating winter weeds for gardeners in Central Texas. From small begin-

nings, it creates long, tangled, climbing masses of weak, scratchy, clinging stems with up to eight narrow leaves with small hooks that radiate out from the stem like the spokes of a wheel. Stems can be as much as 3-feet long. When one part of the clump is pulled, more and more of the adjacent sticky plant matter keeps coming. This is one of the worst "smotherers" of desirable crops.

Many people are allergic to the plant, and must wear gloves and long sleeves to keep from having reddish, raised skin eruptions that itch for several days. The flowers are greenish white and not very noticeable. Even the small, green seed-pods are covered with clasp-

ing hairs. *Galium aparine* is a member of the Rubiaceae, or Madder family. Some of its common names include cleavers, bedstraw, catch-

weed and stickywilly. Although "our" bedstraw is native to the United States, the Lamium family has many members and there are



Bedstraw

numerous other interesting species, some of which have been used to color cheese or curdle milk. The "Our-Lady's Bedstraw" (*Galium verum*), originally from Europe, but now often found in the United States, was said to have been used by the Virgin Mary to stuff bed-clothes at the Nativity, and was supposedly gathered for stuffing purposes by medieval ladies, as well.

The vigilant gardener will remove small plants of Bedstraw when first noticed. At this time, they'll be easily pulled up and disposed of. Bedstraw stems are tough towards the bottom of the plant and difficult to completely remove when more mature.

Spring Will Be Here... (Continued from page 5)

and Dahlia tubers. Fall-flowering perennials such as mums, and Mexican bush sage should be dug and divided before spring growth gets in the way.

In Ellis County, roses need to be pruned by mid-month. Different types of roses require different types of pruning, but generally speaking, cut out dead, dying and weak canes. Leave four to eight healthy canes, while removing about one half of the canes growth above an outward-facing bud. Wait until after the spring bloom to prune climbing and "once blooming" roses. Local nurseries

should have a wide variety of roses in stock now, so it's time to pay them a visit if you want to add new roses to your landscape.

If you've been procrastinating, now is the time to get your garden tools ready to go for this year. Unless you do it yourself, get your power tools to your local repair shop for a tune up. If you wait much longer, it might take you a while to get them back, as they get very busy around the first week of March.

Now is the time to complete any unfinished pruning of shade, ornamental, and fruit trees. Be sure to remove that pesky mistletoe from your trees. Left unchecked, it will enlarge and

cause distorted limb growth and weaken your trees. Birds will spread it by eating the berries.

Water wise tip of the month: plan your flowerbeds so that plants with similar water needs are planted together, thus eliminating over and under watering of some plants. Rain-water harvesting is a great way to save water. The Ellis County Master Gardeners have information on how to catch rain and save it for future watering needs. For additional information or questions on any of these subjects, contact the Ellis County Master Gardener office at (972) 825-5175, or visit us on the web at www.ecmga.com. ✨

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



Swiss Chard

Photo by
Jane LaComette



Lettuce

Photo by Pam Daniel

Easy Green Salad

By June and Ron Garrett

1 sm. head any type lettuce, or ½ large head
1 pkg. Ramen Noodles, crushed (throw away seasoning packet)
½ c. slivered almonds
1 T. sugar
2 T. vinegar
¼ c. oil
dash salt

Chop lettuce. Brown noodles and almonds in small amount of olive oil. Drain and cool. Add to lettuce. Mix sugar, vinegar, oil, and salt. Shake, pour over salad and fold in.

Tips for February

Leafy Greens

Dark-green leafy vegetables are a good source of many vitamins and minerals your body needs to stay healthy, such as vitamins A, C, and K, folate, iron, and calcium. They are also great sources of fiber. It is said that Julius Caesar ate a generous serving of collards as an indigestion preventative after attending royal banquets.

Planting

- Plant cool-season vegetable seeds directly into well prepared garden rows. Cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, kale and potatoes should be planted four weeks before the last average frost date which is March 15th in Ellis County. Lettuce, radishes, carrots, spinach, beets, chard and turnips should be planted two to four weeks prior.
- Container and bare-root roses can be planted this month. Texas A&M EarthKind varieties are easy to maintain and will need less water, fertilizer, and pesticides. Prepare the planting beds by adding four inches of organic matter and four inches of expanded shale and rototill into the soil.
- Plant blackberries, grapes, and fruit and nut trees. Contact Texas AgriLife Extension Service at (972) 825-5175 for the best varieties.
- Plant cool-season annuals such as petunias, Iceland poppies, larkspur, and English daisies from four-inch pots. Larkspur will usually reseed the following year.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Prune bush roses on Valentine's Day, February 14th. Prune old, dead, and weak canes back to the ground. Wear heavy leather gloves to protect hands; use long-handled loppers to remove large and dead canes. Fertilize with compost or aged manure. Leave four to eight vigorous canes, removing one-half of their growth above an outward-facing bud.
- Prune climbing/leaning roses later after their blooming period. Prune errant canes at any time to retain the shape of the plant.
- Cut back old foliage of liriopse and monkey grass with a lawn mower on its highest setting or string trimmer before tips of new growth emerge.
- Dead tops of ornamental grasses can be pruned to the ground or four to

six inches from the ground. Dig and divide large clumps of warm-season ornamental grasses.

- Before new growth appears, cut back herbaceous perennials to basil foliage.
- Dig and divide fall-blooming perennials: asters, mums, Mexican bush sage, Mexican mint marigold, Maximilian sunflowers, and Copper Canyon daisies.

Garden Watch

- Begin controlling insects and diseases on fruit and nut trees. Spraying is essential for a successful harvest. Contact an Ellis County Master Gardener or the Texas AgriLife Extension Service for a copy of the "Homeowner's Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule".
- Watch for aphid and caterpillars on cool-season vegetables. Control aphids with insecticidal soap and caterpillars with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).

Odds and Ends

- Shrubs that only bloom in the spring should not be pruned in late winter. Prune after they bloom.
- Turn the compost pile and keep it moist.
- Plan to have year-round color in your landscape by using a mixture of annuals and perennials. Add some flowering trees and shrubs to your landscape such as redbud, crape myrtle, vitex, Mexican plum, and butterfly bush.
- Install a system to collect rainwater. Visit the web site: <http://aggie-horticulture> or tamu.edu/earthkind/ for more information.



Attention Birders!

By: Jean Wammack, Ellis Country Master Gardener



It's time to clean out and repair nesting boxes.

We have been promoting nesting boxes for the songbirds. Now is the time of year to check your boxes. Clean them out; rub a dry bar of Ivory soap inside the box to discourage wasps from building nests. If a wasp should build inside the box, the birds will depart, even leaving eggs in the nest. If a squirrel or woodpecker has enlarged the entrance hole, place a new front on the box lining up the 1½ inch hole right over the old hole. We are trying to be better stewards by placing a predator guard under the nesting box on the steel pole. You may purchase them or make the guards from stovepipe or PVC. The guards will prevent snakes, raccoons, and squirrels from reaching the eggs or baby birds.



Can you be successful attracting song birds? If you live on acreage, you may be able to attract songbirds: wrens, titmice, chickadees, and bluebirds, by adding nesting boxes. My special interest is the eastern bluebird, a shy member of the thrush family.

Nesting pairs will readily accept man-made boxes. Buy or make a box that opens from the side or front so it is easily monitored and cleaned. Boxes should be placed in an open field on a steel post about five feet above the ground and facing a tree within 50 feet. The tree will provide a perch for the young birds as they begin to

fly. Boxes should be placed well away from buildings and deep shade. It is helpful if there is water in the area. If possible, add a birdbath.

The bluebird's diet is insects, especially grasshoppers! They add berries to their diet during the winter.

The male and female bluebird will build the nest. Then the female starts to lay eggs, generally five. She will incubate the eggs for 12-14 days. After they hatch, the hatchlings are fed in the nest for two weeks. When the young birds fledge, or leave the box, clean the old nest and make sure it is dry and ant free by lifting it up and scraping out the debris that has collected in the bottom of the box. Then replace the nest. A lot of energy goes into nest building, so the birds will be happy to re-use one. Hopefully, the pair will soon start a second clutch, and perhaps a third! With each clutch, the number of eggs is fewer.

Maintaining a nesting box is work, but well worth the visits you'll get from our feathered friends!

The 2011 Ellis Country Master Gardener Officers



From left to right: Jim Dockins, Delegate at Large, Ruth Davis, Vice President-Programs, Joan Brammer, Treasurer, Dan Griffin, Vice President Projects, Jim Goss, Delegate at Large, Cheryl Sandoval, Secretary, Sandra Jones, President, Shirley Campbell, Past President