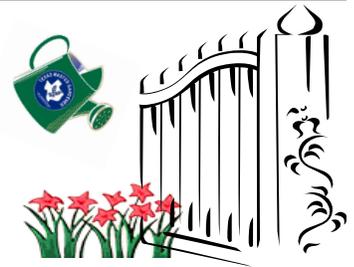




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VIII, Issue Two

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

February, 2015

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 with your landscape. We will feature horticultural articles that we hope you will 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) and click on subscribe. It will be sent around the first of every month. Best of all; it's FREE! Susan Clark, Editor

## What's Happening in February

**Various dates and events. Tarrant County Master Gardeners.** The TCMG have several events listed on their website that may be of interest including a caladium bulb sale, a class on Healthy Lawns with Less Water and more. Visit <http://tarrantmg.org/> for a complete listing.

**Saturday, February 7, 10am–12pm, Dallas County Lepidopterists' Society Meeting presents "Butterfly Host and Nectar Plant Seed Exchange".** There will be a brief program based on the type of seeds members are bringing to share, with the "swap" taking place afterward. To tailor the program, it will be helpful if you can email [daleclark@dallasbutterflies.com](mailto:daleclark@dallasbutterflies.com) with what type of seeds you'll be bringing. If you don't have seeds to share, come to the meeting anyway as there are always plenty to go around. Free of charge. Location: Texas Discovery Gardens, 3601 MLK, Jr. Blvd. Dallas.

**Saturday, February 7, 8am–12pm, BRIT First Saturday.** Enjoy tours, children's activities, vendors, and booths! Events include: plant walks, free tours, Bella's Story Time for children and more! For complete details, visit <http://brit.org/prairieday>.

**Saturday, February 7, 9am, Walk and Talk Bird Tour at the John Bunker Sands Wetland Center.** Binoculars and field guides are available for use. Cost varies. Beginner/Intermediate and Advanced options. Visit <http://www.wetlandcenter.com/> for admission and directions. For info, call (972) 474-9100.

**Sunday, February 8, 11am, Winter Trees and Spring Blooms.** Take a hike with MN Dana Wilson. Only in Texas can you stand amid bare winter trees and a field of early-blooming trout lilies. Visit **Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center** to practice winter tree identification and look at trout lilies and other early-spring blooms. RSVP to [danawilson59@yahoo.com](mailto:danawilson59@yahoo.com) to reserve a space. Located at 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill.

**Thursday, February 13–Monday, February 16, The Great Backyard Bird Count.** For details to conduct your own bird count or group locations, go to <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>

**Friday, February 13, 10pm–6pm and Saturday, February 14, 9am–?, Huge Auction at the Greenery.** Free lunch will be provided both days. Two gift certificates will be given away. Preview days are Wednesday and Thursday. Location: 3671 N. Hwy. 77, Waxahachie. Phone: (972) 617-5459 Web: [www.thegreenerystx.com](http://www.thegreenerystx.com)

**Saturday, February 21, 10am, John Bunker Sands Wetland Center Pond Trail Hike.** This 1.8 mile trail is great for families and those interested in native plants and animals. Cost: \$5.00, includes admission. Visit <http://www.wetlandcenter.com/> for directions and a map. For info, call (972) 474-9100.

**Monday, February 23, 7pm, Indian Trail Master Naturalists present "Texas Nature & Environmental Centers" by Dan Moulton.** The program is free and follows the 6 p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. Meeting location: First United Methodist Church, Family Life Center 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie, TX. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email [ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:ellis-tx@tamu.edu)

**Saturday, February 28, 9am–12pm, Dogwood Canyon—Fourth Saturday Workday.** Located at 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. For info, contact Julie Collins at [jcollins@audubon.org](mailto:jcollins@audubon.org).

**Monday, March 2, 9am–11am, Kaufman County Master Gardeners present "Low and No Water Herbs"** at their monthly meeting. Gayle Southerland of the North Texas Unit

(Continued on page 5)

TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION



### Listen to KBEC

Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. on 1390 AM.

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a five minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian

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## Parsley

Parsley is a biennial herb that grows 18" to 24" tall. Considered a breath freshener, parsley contains significant amounts of vitamins A, B, and C. Add it to salads, egg dishes, cream sauces, gravies, stews, and soups.

Seeds are slow to germinate so it is best to start from container plants. Parsley will remain green through the winter, but is best treated as an annual.

The curly (crispum) variety makes an attractive border around a vegetable, herb, or flower garden. The flat leafed (Italian) parsley has a more pronounced flavor and is preferred by professional chefs.

## Beets

Beets are a dual purpose vegetable grown for their tender, young top growth and, later, for its fleshy roots. They must have loose and well-drained soil to develop good roots. Spring planting should be February 10–March 1 and fall planting is September 1–15.

Harvest greens before they reach six inches tall and roots when the bulbs are two inches in diameter. Do not allow roots to become large and tough. Beets are great for roasting, canning or pickling. Recommended varieties: Detroit Park Red and Pacemaker III.

## It's February....What Needs To Be Done?

### Planting

- ♥ Plant cool-season vegetable seeds such as lettuce, spinach, radishes and carrots in mid-February directly into well prepared soil. Cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, beets, swish chard, kale and potatoes should be planted two to four weeks before the last average frost date, which is March 15<sup>th</sup> in Ellis County. Plant asparagus crowns in 10-12 inches of soil.
- ♥ Container and bare-root roses can be planted this month.
- ♥ When planting from a container of bare-root roses, use a two gallon or larger size. Texas A&M Earth-Kind<sup>®</sup> varieties are easy to maintain and will need less water, fertilizer and pesticides. Prepare the planting beds by adding three inches of organic matter and three inches of expanded shale and tilling into the top six to ten inches of existing soil.
- ♥ Plant blackberries, grapes, fruit, and nut trees.
- ♥ After planting, cut off the top half of peach trees and all side branches to encourage new lateral branches. Contact Texas AgriLife Extension Service–Ellis County at (972) 825-5175 for the best varieties.
- ♥ Dig and divide warm-season perennials, such as cannas, coneflowers, perennial salvia, mums, and fall asters before they break dormancy.

### Fertilizing and Pruning

- ♥ Prune bush roses around Valentine's Day, February 14<sup>th</sup>. Prune back to the ground old, dead, and weak canes. Leave four to eight vigorous canes, removing one-half of their growth above an outward-facing bud. Feed roses with a balanced fertilizer, compost, or aged manure. Wait to prune climbing or leaning roses until after they bloom.
- ♥ Dead tops of ornamental grasses can be pruned four to six inches from the ground. Dig and divide large clumps of warm-season ornamental grasses especially if the center of the grass has died.
- ♥ Cut back the tops of herbaceous perennials to the ground or to basal foliage. If they are hardy, new growth will emerge from the roots in the spring.
- ♥ Prune damaged, rubbing, or unwanted limbs and trunks from crape myrtles.

### Garden Watch

- ♥ Begin controlling insects and diseases on fruit and nut trees. Spraying is essential for a successful harvest. For a copy of the "Homeowners Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule", contact an Ellis County Master Gardener or the Texas AgriLife Extension Service–Ellis County .
- ♥ Watch for aphid and caterpillars on cool season vegetables. Control aphids with insecticidal soap and caterpillars with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).
- ♥ Spray hollies, euonymus, and shade and fruit trees with horticultural oil, referred to as "dormant" oil, for scale and over-wintering insects.



## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener



**Phlox**—Phlox Family (Polemoniaceae)

*Phlox* spp.

**Region:** 1–10 (Ellis County is Region 4)

**Size:** 8–20 inches

**Blooms:** February–June, Annual/Perennial

One or more species of *Phlox* can be found nearly anywhere in Texas, with twelve species and nineteen subspecies in the state. Individual species may be difficult for the amateur to distinguish, but they are easy to recognize as a group. Color is variable, but most are pink, while others may be white, violet, blue or red.

Five petals flare from an evenly narrow tube to a flattened “tray.” Petals of some species have pointed tips, some are notched, but all widen toward the outer edge. Flowers are numerous, and only a few open at a time from terminal clusters. Leaves are opposite in the lower portion of the plants. Phlox forms broad colonies and most species reseed readily. These plants are frequently seen with bluebonnet, blue-eyed grass, paintbrush, and other spring wildflowers, brightening the landscape with strong splashes of color.

### Pickled Beets

By Melinda Kocian

4 lbs. beets (1 ½-3 inches in diameter)

3 cups thinly sliced onions

2½ cups apple cider vinegar

1½ cups water

1 tsp. pickling salt

2 cups sugar

1 tsp. whole allspice

½-¾ tsp. whole cloves

3 sticks cinnamon, broken in half

1 T mustard seeds

Wash beets. Leave 2-inches of stem and tap root. Cover with boiling water. Cook until al dente tender (25-30 minutes). Peel, trim ends and cut into 1-inch pieces; place in a bowl.

Combine cinnamon and seeds in cheese cloth; secure top with a string. Combine remaining ingredients in a large pan. Bring to boil; add spices. Reduce heat; simmer 5 minutes. Add beets and onion—cook until hot through. Remove cheese cloth bag.

Pack beets into hot, scalded jars. Ladle pickling liquid over beets, leaving ½-inch headspace. Put on lids. Lower into boiling water. Bring to a boil; process for 30 minutes.



Lawn & Garden Expo  
Save The Date!  
Saturday, March 28, 2015  
Ellis County Master Gardener



## Herbal Pet Care

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



One of the many benefits of having an herb garden, especially one with a semi-cultivated area that pets are welcomed to enjoy, is the pleasure of watching them react to some of the plants. Dogs and cats will often chew on grasses to aid digestion or effectively cause them to vomit up unhealthy foods.

Many cats love catnip, cat mint, and cat thyme, but they, like dogs, often freely munch on the leaves of many herbs including parsley, basil, dandelion, mint, chervil, sorrel, and lemon balm—all rich in a variety of minerals and vitamins. Such snacking is often a sign that the pets are seeking certain nutrients lacking in their regular diet or they instinctively know that certain herbs also have medicinal properties to prevent or alleviate discomforts and illness.

Following are a few herbs that grow well in the North Texas climate and are beneficial to pets and animals:

Catmint, and its most noted cultivar, catnip, (*Nepeta cataria*), can cause cats to act foolish. The bruised leaves of a newly transplanted catnip plant release nepetalactone, a component of the essential oil that mimics a cat's sexual pheromones. Catnip thus acts as an aphrodisiac.

Cat thyme (*Teucrium marum*), more commonly seen in rock gardens than in herb gardens, might look like silver thyme at first glance, but your cat might think this fuzzy herb is a garden of earthly delight.

Cat thyme belongs to the mint family, as does thyme. Cat thyme looks like a hairy, upright silver thyme, but actually it is in the germander genus, which consists of more than 300 species. Cat thyme achieves its cat appeal through different chemical compounds than those in catnip. The crushed leaves emit a strong fragrance suggestive of mint and camphor.

Rose hips have recently become popular as a healthy treat for pet chinchillas and guinea pigs. These small rodents are unable to manufacture their own vitamin C and are unable to digest many vitamin-C rich foods. Rose hips provide a sugarless, safe way to increase their vitamin C intake.

Rose hips are also fed to horses. The dried and powdered form can be fed at a maximum of 1 tablespoon per day to improve coat condition and new hoof growth. The rose hip, or rose haw, is the fruit of the rose plant that typically is red-to-orange, but ranges from dark purple to black in some species.

Rose hips begin to form in spring after the rose flower begins to fade, and ripen in late summer through autumn. Horses and livestock will seek out wild varieties of rose hips if allowed to grow in the pasture.

Garlic is an important herb for pets (and people). It cleanses and tones the entire digestive system. By removing excess mucus from the intestinal tract it keeps worms to a minimum. External parasites are also repelled by the smell of garlic. The most effective form of garlic is the freshly chopped cloves, mixed into food. Depending on the size of your cat or dog, give one-half to two cloves to each pet two or three times a week.

Following is a highly nutritious recipe for a pet treat that will produce an eager and appreciative response from your pets:

### Minty Cat & Dog Crunches

- 4 cups cooked millet
- 1/2 cup brown rice flour (or any flour)
- 1/2 cup skim milk
- 1/2 cup fresh or 1/4 cup dried mint
- 1 large clove garlic, finely chopped
- 4 cups cooked corn grits
- 1/2 cup barley flour (or any other flour)
- 1/4 cup yeast
- 1/4 cup fresh or 1/8 cup dried parsley
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup wheat germ
- 2 tbs. seaweed powder

Mix all ingredients together except oil. When thoroughly mixed, add oil slowly.

Spread mixture about 1/4 inch thick onto lightly oiled cookie sheet. Place in 400°F degree oven for 45 minutes or until crisp. Allow to cool, and break into small pieces. Store in an air-tight container in a cool place.



Interested in becoming a  
2015 Expo Sponsor Or  
Expo Exhibitor?

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

**Reserve the date: March 28, 2015!**

## Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarship 2015



In 2003, ECMGA decided to make scholarships available to graduating high school seniors residing in Ellis County. We wanted to provide opportunities to students that chose college studies in horticulture and/or life sciences disciplines. Since then, we have awarded 29 high school students with college scholarships totaling \$42,500.

One of the objectives of the ECMGA is to build partnerships with the Ellis County community to expand horticultural education and opportunities. In keeping with this objective, the ECMGA will again make scholarship funds available in 2015 to deserving high school seniors pursuing studies in horticulture-related fields. To qualify, the applicant must be a graduating high school senior residing in Ellis County from an Ellis County High School, Ellis County Charter High School, Venus ISD, Cedar Hill ISD, or Ellis County Home School Program. Additionally, the applicant must have an elected academic major in a horticulture-related field that includes, but is not limited to horticulture, agriculture, environmental science, forestry, botany, or entomology. Other horticulture-related fields of studies are defined in the scholarship application package available on our website. Applicants must be able to provide proof of acceptance at an accredited institution of higher education.

ECMGA college scholarships awarded to qualifying students in 2015 will be up to \$3,000. Students applying for the ECMGA Scholarship are invited to visit <http://www.ecmga.com> to download the application package found under the "What's Happening" tab. The completed application may be submitted by registered mail (return receipt requested) or in person to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office located at 701 South I-35, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165. If additional information is needed regarding the ECMGA Scholarship, please call (972) 825-5175. All scholarship applications must be received no later than April 1, 2015, by 4pm.

*What's Happening (Continued from page 1)*

of the Herb Society of America will discuss herbs that require little to no supplemental watering. The event is free and the public is welcome. Light refreshments will be served. Location: First Community Church, 103 S. Main St., Crandall. Visit <http://www.kcmga.org/> for info.

### **Cedar Ridge Preserve**

7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas  
[www.audubondallas.org/cedarridge.html](http://www.audubondallas.org/cedarridge.html)

**Saturday, February 21, 9am–12pm, Conservation in Action Workday.** Work in the butterfly garden and on the trails. Water and snacks provided. For info, call Jim Varnum at (214) 543-2055 or email [jvarnum@aol.com](mailto:jvarnum@aol.com).

**Sunday, February 22, 10am and 1pm or Saturday, February 28, 10am, Trout Lily Walk.** Master Naturalist Jim Varnum will conduct a short walk to observe CRP's trout lilies. The walk will last approximately one hour. Bring your camera. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support. Join Jim for a nature walk afterwards. Contact Jim at [jvarnum@aol.com](mailto:jvarnum@aol.com) or (214) 543-2055. RSVP appreciated, but not required.

### **Texas Discovery Gardens**

3601 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Dallas  
[TexasDiscoveryGardens.org](http://TexasDiscoveryGardens.org)

**Saturday, February 14, 11am, Garden Explorers Walk: Romantic Gardens.** Valentine's Day is for lovers, a tour of the gardens is one way to share the day with the one you love. Some of the hidden treasures couples can enjoy at Texas Discovery Gardens will be pointed out. It ends in time for the Butterfly Release talk at noon in the conservatory. *Included with admission.*

**Saturday, February 14, 6pm–8pm, Love is in the Air.** Stroll through the romantic Butterfly House as the sun sets and release ladybugs with your special someone. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres featuring chocolate-covered insects. The evening ends with Entomologist John Watts' talk on bug love, or insect reproduction. \$35 ea. or \$50 per couple. \$28 TDG Member or \$40 per Member Couple. Register in advance.

**Saturday, February 21, 10am-12pm, Rose Pruning Workshop.** Join Dr. Peter Schaar in the Heirloom Rose Garden as he slashes through the heart of rose pruning myths. Learn the proper way to prune roses to have plentiful, gorgeous blooms come spring. Take home a new rose bush to add to your own rose garden! \$25, \$20/Members. Register in advance.

**Saturday, February 21, 1pm-5pm, Landscape Design.** The Director of Horticulture, Roger Sanderson, shows how he designed the newest gardens and how you can use the same techniques to design a garden of your own. Learn the proper way to measure your location, plot plants, and lay out the space prior to planting. If you know which space you wish to design, bring pictures and dimensions with you. \$50, \$40 for TDG Members. Register in advance.



## Feeding Winter Birds: Their Favorite Foods

By: Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



If you want to increase the action in your garden this winter, consider feeding the birds.

Providing sunflower

seed, thistle, suet, and fruit will bring in many species that are fun to watch. Water can also be used to attract birds to the garden. Water can be in short supply during a dry winter.

Bird baths will attract many birds, including warblers, that generally ignore feeders. Every spring and fall, many area gardeners that have recirculated ponds or bird baths see painted buntings, indigo buntings, orioles, several types of warblers and all the birds that take seed from feeders.

Sunflower seed attracts cardinals, titmice, chickadees, jays, grackles, house finches, goldfinches, doves, English sparrows, and many other species. It is very nutritious and provides high levels of oil to fuel the birds on cold evenings.

Birds, such as robins, thrushes, bluebirds, and waxwings, usually don't show up at feeders because seeds are not a major component of their diet. But you can still tempt them to dinner with an offering of fruit. Soften dried raisins and currants by soaking them in water, then offer them at a feeding station.

Mockingbirds and catbirds will also find sliced, fresh fruit attractive. Try pounding a few headless nails into a trellis, tree post, or log. Halves of apples, oranges, or lemons stuck on the nails will attract mockingbirds, finches, orioles and other species. Or just lay out bananas, grapes, cranberries, plums, and peaches on a platform or tray.

The best bird feeders for our area are the steel feeders with weight sensitive perches. The steel resists the squirrel teeth and the weight

sensitive perches allow you to shut out squirrels, white-winged doves, and grackles in favor of smaller birds with smaller appetites. Using safflower seed is a good option to attract cardinals without encouraging squirrels and other birds.

Thistle seed is very popular because it is the favorite seed of American and lesser goldfinches. They become very tame and are entertaining as they squabble and do acrobatics on the feeder roosts. There are a great many tubular feeders manufactured especially for thistle. Squirrels do not like thistle seed so the feeders do not have to be armored.

For ground feeding birds like Lincoln sparrows, towhees, Inca doves, and quail, provide a mix of millet, cracked corn, and sunflower seed on a low platform or on the ground. Provide the seed in the morning and only put out a quality seed that is consumed by early afternoon. Leftover seed attracts rodents.

There are many flavors of suet and suet dough on the market. Suet is beef fat. It is attractive to insect eaters like woodpeckers, wrens, jays, starlings, and king-

lets. Orange flavored suet and berry flavored suet is popular with birds.

Peanut butter is another great food for attracting the insect eaters. You can fix a high energy bird food by mixing peanut butter with a smaller portion of corn meal or oatmeal. This combination is necessary so that the small birds do not choke on the sticky peanut butter.

Place globs of this mixture into pre-drilled holes in a small log (or just slather it on!). Hang the log, with a wire or chain attached, to a tree or pole. Even birds that usually feed only on seeds will often take advantage of the peanut butter mix. Let your children have fun spreading the peanut butter mix on a pinecone and hanging it outside. Like me, the birds prefer the crunchy.

Select a location for each feeder where you can observe the action from a window or a seat on the patio. Feeders that hang from a tree branch and are more open will attract more birds than a feeder in the middle of the crown or near the trunk.

Sources: Dr. Calvin Finch and Ro Wauer



I Love Onions  
With Ginger Cole  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Last week, as I was planting over 200 onions, I was happily singing my rendition of Susan Christie's 1966 hit, "I Love Onions". There is a song for everything and a happy song helps to make gardening even more therapeutic.

Wait a minute! What, only 200 onions? We're supposed to have 365 onions. You know a day without an onion is like a day without sunshine. For my husband and me, it would be. We must be onion junkies. That's probably a good thing, since onions are very good sources of immune-supportive vitamin C.

They are also a good source of enzyme-activating manganese and molybdenum, as well as heart-healthy vitamin B6, fiber, folate, and potassium. Mostly we eat lots of them because we love the taste.

Have we been missing out? Nutritionally, yes we have been. I did a quick comparison chart of onions, leek, shallots, and garlic. As it turns out, not one of these wonderful root vegetables is the nutritional winner. These easy to grow plants are in the same family and vary in nutrients, flavor, and culinary uses.

We already have German straight neck garlic all over the place. Once started, it practically grows itself. This year, I've saved some space for shallots and leeks. The growing instructions are about the same as onions. While shallots and leek varieties seem to be fairly universal for most growing regions, onions are a bit more specific due to the amount of day length required for success.

Onions come in short, intermediate, and long-day varieties. Short day onions are recommended for our area. Texas Legend, 1015 Texas Super Sweet, Texas Early White, Hybrid Southern Belle Red, Yellow Granex, White Bermuda, and Red Creole are recommended for our area. Some intermediate day varieties such as Borettana Cippolini and Red

Marble Cippolini do well here.

Onions are pretty easy to grow if you select the right varieties and plant them in a location with good drainage and plenty of sunshine. Over the years we have planted onions in different locations: raised beds in the garden, along



## DID YOU KNOW?

- ♥ Onions are high in energy and water content. They are low in calories, and have a generous amount of B6, B1, and Folic acid.
- ♥ Onions contain chemicals which help fight the free radicals in our bodies. Free radicals cause disease and destruction to cells which are linked to at least 60 diseases.
- ♥ To make onions milder, soak them in milk or pour boiling water over slices and let stand. Rinse with cold water.
- ♥ When a person eats at least half a raw onion a day, their good type HDL cholesterol goes up an average of 30%. Onions increase circulation, lower blood pressure, and prevent blood clotting.

the property line in our "row crop" area, and in the berm in front of the house as a part of our edible landscape.

Since onions benefit from reliable and consistent moisture (not soggy or wet), the onions in our raised beds with drip irrigation system were the most robust. Our onions in "row crops" and in the berm also did well, but seemed a little

strong on flavor. All of these planting sites are raised at least four inches, which provides the onions good drainage.

Since we do not irrigate two of the areas, we used wood mulch about two inches deep to help these areas retain moisture.

We did water all of the onions when we planted them, but only consistently watered the ones in our garden raised bed area. In addition to adding lots of compost to the soil prior to planting, we side-dressed the onions with organic fertilizer with high nitrogen content at planting and then every three weeks.

Onions and their relatives are susceptible to foliar diseases that can cause rotting during storage. These types of diseases are not noticeable during the growing season, but may be prevented by spraying the plants every couple of weeks with a fungicide approved for use on food crops. If you use a fungicide, be sure to follow the directions on the product label.

I am experimenting with using cornmeal and molasses as fertilizer and fungicide. Who knew that cornmeal has some antifungal properties. Since it is non-toxic, I spread it by hand liberally in all of my garden areas. I'll let you know next year how that worked out.

Now is the time to start preparing your planting beds for successful onion family crops. Just remember these tips. Your site selections should be sunny and well drained. Soil preparation should include lots of compost. Plant onion varieties recommended for our area, although most any variety of garlic, leeks, and shallots will do well.

Spacing between plants should be about four inches. Water and fertilize onion sets when planted. Drip irrigation works best for onions. If you can feel moisture

(Continued on page 8)

## To Cover Crop or Not

With Mary Lee Nelson  
Ellis County Master Gardener



On a beautiful, 61-degree, sunny mid-January day, I was thinking of lovely onions and red ripe tomatoes. We have had a good amount of rain this winter, leaving the soil in my raised beds in good shape for planting. My daughter, Joanna, and I took rake and hoe to the soil, turning it over and easily breaking up any clods we came across. My only regret is that I didn't plant the cover crops I wanted to try, in lieu of a winter garden, before the early cold weather we had in November. Ah, the best-laid plans. We all know how that goes.

Why didn't I go ahead and risk wasting a handful of the seeds, even though they arrived in the mail three days into that early cold spell? Where was my pioneer spirit? FAST FORWARD... After talking to Park Seed, where I bought the mixed ground cover seeds, I decided to take a chance and plant some in my raised bed today on January 21st. This was after three days with sunshine, one day at almost 70 degrees, with rain coming in. I felt like I was back in college, where I carried out a field experiment on algae for an Aquatic Biology class! Let's see how this works. In the meantime...

The idea of cover crops is to provide protection to fallow soil over winter and, by tilling the plants under prior to spring planting, add beneficial enrichments to the soil. According to Charlie Nardozzi, a horticulturist who writes for The National Gardening Association, cover crops "control erosion, attract pollinating insects, break up heavy soils, improve soil fertility and structure, and reduce weeds." He also points out that by growing your own organic matter, you may have no need to import soil amendments or, I would speculate, at least fewer amendments.

Here is a list of the organic seeds in my Park Seed mix:

Red Clover ( <i>Trifolium pretense</i> )	legume	perennial/biennial
Fava Bean ( <i>Vicia faba</i> )	legume	perennial grown as annual
Yellow pea ( <i>Pisum sativum</i> )	legume	annual
Barley ( <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> )	grass	annual
Cayuse Oats ( <i>Avena sativa</i> )	grass	annual
Ryegrain ( <i>Secale cereale</i> )	grass	annual

Legumes increase the nitrogen and organic matter in soil. While grasses don't increase nitrogen, they increase organic matter and improve the structure of compacted soils, as well as control erosion. Annual cover crops should be mowed in the spring before seeds set, then tilled under. At [eartheasy.com](http://eartheasy.com), Greg Seaman explains that "mowing" involves using garden shears to chop the cover crop to a few inches above the soil. Then, further chop up the bunched mass on the bed. Seaman points out that turning under the cover crop takes more effort. The plant mass will now require chopping with a sharp hoe to cut up the stubble and the root mass that surfaces during the hoeing. When you are finished, some stubble and plant residue will still be visible, but will break down quickly.

In his article, Greg Seaman says to think of cover crops as "feeding the soil." In the winter, they make the garden continue to work for you and give you a head start on the spring growing season. So, lacking any results from the belated sowing of my cover crop seeds, this year I will decide to "plant-winter-veggies-or-not" early enough to get in a cover crop. There are a lot more legumes and grasses recommended for cover than I could possibly mention. Just Google "cover crops" for more information. I will let you know how my experiment turns out.

### I Love Onions (Continued from page 7)

in the soil when you stick your finger into the ground up to your first knuckle, then the onions are properly watered. Water only when the soil has dried out. Fertilize with a high source of nitrogen, e.g., 21-0-0 every three weeks and use a fungicide every couple of weeks. Use mulch to conserve moisture and reduce weeds.

Onions are fully mature approximately 110 days after planting. A visual cue that your onions, shallots and garlic have matured is the tops will yellow and fall over. To harvest, lift the onions out of the ground and allow them to dry on the ground in the sun. I actually use an old



trampoline as a drying rack for onions and garlic. Once the onions have dried so the outer layer of skin is papery, trim the roots from the bulb and cut back the dried foliage. Store the onions in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location.

Leeks are a bit different. I like mine

green with a diameter of about an inch. Generally I harvest leeks as I plan to use them. Pull them gently from the soil, wash them, and store them in the refrigerator two to four weeks.

Whether you are a novice gardener or an onion junkie, with just a little planning, onions and their relatives, leeks, shallots, and garlic, can be rewarding crops. They are easy to grow, easy to harvest, and easy to store.

For more information on growing onions, visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/publications/onions/onions.html>.

### Light House for Learning

(With the Ellis County Master Gardeners)

For reservations, call Melissa Cobb at (972) 923-4631

Register online at [http://www.wisd.org/default.aspx?name=CO\\_LighthouseforLearning](http://www.wisd.org/default.aspx?name=CO_LighthouseforLearning)



**Monday March 2, 6pm–7:30pm, Raised Beds and Square Foot Gardening.** Learn how to construct and plant an easy garden for smaller spaces or for beginning vegetable gardeners. You will learn to design your space, amend your soils, plant your vegetables, and rotate your crops in your new garden. Instructor: Joan Brammer. Cost: \$12.00

**Monday, March 16, 6pm-7:30pm, Firewise Landscaping.** Learn how to increase the chances of your structure surviving a nearby wildfire. This presentation will take only an hour or so. You will leave with a list of resources and written materials that will help you evaluate your surroundings and take responsibility for reducing the available fuel around your home. Instructor: Lee Dann. Cost: \$12.00

**Monday, March 23 6pm–7:30pm, From the Garden to the Salad Bowl.** This class covers growing lettuces, spinach, and other greens along with tomatoes that like Texas, onions and other salad vegetables. Also covers growing and using fresh herbs for salad dressings. Class members will help put together a salad and make an herbal vinaigrette for sampling. Go home with growing instructions and recipes. This is a perfect beginner class or for a container gardener. Instructor: Arlene Hamilton, Cost: \$12.00

**Monday, April 6, 6pm–7:30pm, Drought Tolerant Plants for Texas.** Because of the likelihood that water will not be as affordable or plentiful in the future, now is the time to consider growing drought-tolerant plants and selecting plants for your landscape with an eye toward reducing the supplemental watering that many plants require. The class will cover varieties of Texas adapted plants, characteristics that make drought tolerant plants, how to recognize plants that use less water, and how to grow them. Instructor: Ted Ryder. Cost: \$12.00

**Monday, April 13, 6pm–7:30pm, Herbal Vinegars, Butters, and Spreads.** Dried or fresh, herbs lend a wonderful flavor, aroma, and even healthful factor to foods we enjoy on a regular basis. In this class, you will learn how to prepare and use herbs to create tasty herbal vinegars, butters, and spreads. This is a hands-on class where you will come away with recipes and your own herbal vinegar to take home. Instructor: Susan Clark. Cost: \$12.00 + \$5.00 supply fee.

**Monday, April 20, 6pm–7:30pm, Backyard Chickens.** Before you start your backyard flock, come learn some tips on how to successfully manage backyard chickens. We'll discuss city ordinances, neighborhood associations and neighbors as well as housing, predators, sanitation, and raising or obtaining laying hens. Instructors: Ginger Cole and Khalin Zadwick. Cost: \$12.00

**Tuesdays, April 21–May 12, four classes 6pm–8pm, “Ag 101”–Beginning Farmer/Rancher.** Join this experienced instructor as you cover topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management. This class will be held at the Ellis County Texas A&M Agri Life Extension Office at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3 in Waxahachie. Instructor: Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources. Cost: \$22.00

Save The Date!  
Saturday, March 28, 2015



Find us on:  
**facebook®**

Are you a Facebooker? Ellis County Master Gardeners are on Facebook and we'd love to have you join us. Use our page as your point of contact to ask us gardening questions or get information about flowers, vegetables and herbs...we cover it all! You'll find us at the link below, and all you have to do is click the "Like" button to see our daily posts! We look forward to hearing from you with questions and comments.

<https://www.facebook.com/ECMGA>



## Landscape Gardening

From: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

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

### Edible Flowers

by Cathey Wilkinson Barash, National Garden Bureau

Edible flowers have become familiar garnishes in countless restaurants (the 21st century's equivalent of parsley). However, like parsley, most people don't

debut on salads in restaurants across the country. Their bold orange or scarlet color enlivens mixed greens. Up close, they have a slightly sweet fragrance, but their unique flavor sets them apart. Pop the entire flower into your mouth and as you chew, you first get a sweet essence from the nectar, followed by a bold peppery tang.

Make colorful and flavorful vinegar from nasturtiums by adding flowers to a good white wine vinegar. Let it sit in the dark (light will fade the color) for several weeks. Strain the flowers out and pour the vinegar into a clean glass bottle. Use it to make a flavorful salad dressing.



You can also make a unique martini with vodka steeped in nasturtiums. In addition to orange and scarlet, nasturtium flowers come in yellow, pale orange, cream, and bicolors.

The nasturtium is a tasty annual that blooms all summer. This plant thrives in poor or less fertile soil and can withstand some shade.

**Pansies** are a favorite as they come in so many different colors, single and combinations. When eating pansies, you can break two of the cardinal rules of edible flowers: eat only the petals and remove the pistils and stamens before eating. In fact, you can eat the pansy

sepals as well.

Some pansies have a delicate fragrance, primarily the blue-flowered ones. They have a mild wintergreen flavor. Make simply elegant hors d'oeuvres by spreading some cream cheese on a plain cracker (round or square) and top it with a whole pansy.

If you are planning a special event, you can sow seeds for the color you fancy. Pansies are perfect for candying and decorating cakes, anything from a simple sheet cake to a wedding cake.

**Calendulas**, also known as pot marigold, used to be called poor man's saffron. The yellow or orange petals of the daisy-like flowers can be used like saffron, but to get the effect, you need to chop them and cook them with oil to bring out the color and flavor.

Sauté some chopped onions in a bit of olive oil, add chopped calendula petals, rice, and boiling water or broth. The result is a beautiful side dish that looks like (and could be made into) Spanish paella. Calendula petals add pizzazz to carrot cake. Sprinkle petals on the cream cheese icing.



**Squash blossoms** have a mild vegetable flavor, similar to zucchini or yellow squash. All squash flowers are edible from acorn to patty pan squash to crook-neck squash and zucchini, of course. Traditional in Mediterranean cuisine,

(Continued on page 11)

eat them. They move the flowers, nasturtiums and pansies are the most commonly seen, to the side of the plate just like they used to do with parsley.

In the past ten years, edible flowers have gone from garnish to ingredient in restaurant cuisine. You know that they have caught on when you can find edible flowers among the fresh herbs at grocery stores, not just in the trendsetting areas of the country, but in rural areas too.

However, buying edible flowers is expensive and they are fragile and ideally eaten the same day they are picked. Even day-old flowers lose some of their texture and flavor. If you want to have a salad with a bunch of nasturtiums, great guacamole with cilantro flowers, or dandelion "mushrooms," you need to grow your own.

By growing your own edible flowers, you are assured of their freshness and that they are grown organically. No doubt, some of the plants you already grow from seed to beautify your home have edible flowers.

**Nasturtiums** are the most readily recognized edible flower, having made their

Landscape Gardening (Continued from page 10)

squash blossoms are usually stuffed with flavored breadcrumbs or ricotta cheese and sauteed or fried. Pumpkin and gourd flowers are also edible.

As far as zucchini are concerned, they seem to grow from small tasty fruits to baseball bats overnight; you can never keep up with them. Eating the flowers is sort of like birth control for the plants—the more flowers you eat, the less zucchini you have to deal with.

**Lemon Gem and Tangerine Gem marigolds** (*Tagetes tenuifolia*) with their fernlike foliage are the only edible marigolds. They have a citrusy-tarragon flavor, but little scent. When you pull the petals from the flower, break off the right-angled portion; it is bitter. Marigolds add spice to something as common as deviled eggs.

Although most people think of **dandelions** as weeds, the flowers are edible when young. There are varieties that have been bred for their size and leaves, which make a lovely addition to the spring garden, and will surprise your neighbors.

Native Americans dipped the entire young flower in egg and then in cornmeal and fried it. It's amazing how this turns the slightly bitter flower into the flavor of a mushroom.

One of the best things about edible flow-

ers is that they make ordinary family food into something fit for a visit from royalty. Their colors add excitement and the flowers themselves add zest to any dish.

Most herb flowers are safe to eat; their flavor is milder and sweeter than the leaves. Try growing dill, fennel, arugula, basil, chives, cilantro, dill, garlic chives, mustard, and society garlic. Adding flowers to a dish as mundane as potato salad or macaroni salad (especially from

the deli) transforms it into something special.

What is best about edible flowers is that they are as beautiful in the garden as they are tasty in the kitchen. They are dual-purpose plants that can be included in any type of garden—formal, cottage, or mixed border. No matter where you grow them, pick them like fruit (in their prime) and enjoy them for all their attributes.



2014 Single Specimen  
1st Place Winner

## ECMGA Amateur Photo Contest

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association announces its annual photo contest is underway as of September 1, 2014. **Last date for submissions is March 15, 2015.**

Grab your cameras and get out in your yard, garden, and Ellis County and take your best shot! **You can submit up to five photos**, so you may want to submit photos from different seasons, as well as, your personal favorite. Vegetables and summer garden pictures are great, but don't forget to include beautiful fall and winter photos, too. Please **do not include** people in your photos.

For contest details and submission of entries, go to **Photo Contest** at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com). There is **no cost to enter** the contest, and photographers can enter up to **five photographs per category**. Prizes will be awarded to first, second, and third place in

each of two categories: "Single Specimen" and "In the Garden". Each winner will receive a gift certificate from one of the following businesses: Roland's Nursery or The Greenery in Waxahachie or EarthTones Greenery in Midlothian.

# Thank You All!!

Thanks to the sponsors, exhibitors, and visitors for making the  
**2014 - 14th Annual**  
**Ellis County Master Gardeners' Lawn & Garden Expo**  
such a success!

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