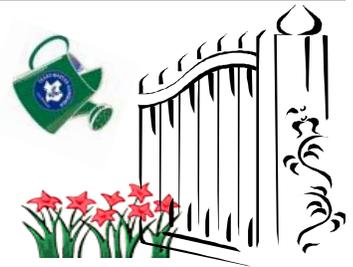




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume IV, Issue 12

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

January, 2011

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month by month agenda of what you should be doing to your landscape. We will be featuring horticulture articles that we hope you will find interesting, important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website [www.ECMGA.com](http://www.ECMGA.com), click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE! Melinda Kocian, editor/Susan Clark, co-editor

## What's Happening in January

**Sunday, January 2** - Last day of the Dallas Arboretum's Holiday at the Arboretum 'The Magic of Santa'. For more information, visit [http://www.dallasarboretum.org/special\\_events/MagicOfSanta.htm](http://www.dallasarboretum.org/special_events/MagicOfSanta.htm) or call **214-515-6500**. Open daily 9am - 5pm; closed New Years Day. Located at 8525 Garland Rd., Dallas, TX 75218.

**Monday, January 3** - Sign up Deadline for Master Gardener training! (see page 3)

**Mondays, January 10 through February 7, or**

**February 21 through March 21, 10-12noon** - "Victory Garden - The Vegetable Series". Pre-payment: \$225 (Due by Feb. 4). For more information, call Marilyn Simmons, Garden Inspirations at 214-497-3918 or [www.gardeninspirations-tx.com](http://www.gardeninspirations-tx.com).

### Cedar Ridge Preserve

**Saturday, January 15** -

- Conservation in Action workday: 9-11 a.m.
  - Winter Bird Walk with Master Naturalist Jim Varnum: 8-10 a.m.
  - Winter Nature Walk with Master Naturalist Jim Varnum: 11-12:30 p.m.
- For more information contact Jim Varnum: [jvarnum@aol.com](mailto:jvarnum@aol.com).



### 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



### Welcome Susan Clark!

I want to introduce my new Co-Editor: Susan Clark. Susan is from the 2009 class of Ellis County Master Gardener graduates. She has graciously accepted my offer to be co-editor of the E-Garden newsletter and produced the December 2010 issue. What a great job! We will be alternating every other month and filling in for each other in case of scheduling conflicts. Thanks again, Susan!

Melinda Kocian

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# Happy New Year!

## It's January - What Needs to be Done?



### Garlic and Onions

Photos by Linda Moxley

#### Mesa Salsa

By Lee Dann

3 large tomatoes, chopped  
 1 tomatillo, diced  
 4 green onions, thinly sliced  
 1 bunch cilantro, no stems (or less to taste)  
 1 (4-oz.) can jalapenos, diced, drained (to taste)  
 2 T. lime juice  
 2 T. olive oil  
 1 tsp. cumin  
 ¼ tsp. sugar  
 1 clove garlic, minced  
 Mix ingredients, taste after ½ hour and adjust for seasoning. Store in glass; refrigerate.

#### Tips for January

Most of the sweet yellow onions, that people all over the world enjoy because you can "eat 'em like an apple," can trace their origin to the Lone Star State. Onions are high in vitamin C, dietary fiber, vitamin B6, folate and manganese.

#### Planting

- Winter is the time to transplant mature trees and shrubs while they are dormant. It is best if they are root pruned in the fall (that is, cutting the roots around the plant with a spade to stimulate new growth). Water well before digging. For best results, trees should have a trunk of one inch in diameter and a 12-inch root ball.
- Containers of pansies, dianthus, snapdragons, ornamental kale and cabbage can still be set out.
- Tulip and hyacinth bulbs which have been chilled for 8 weeks should be planted immediately after removing from the refrigerator.
- Tomatoes – especially those hard to find in the spring – can be planted from seed mid-month.

#### Fertilizing and Pruning

- Prune trees, including live oaks and red oaks, to remove broken and unwanted branches, or to raise the canopy to allow more light underneath.
- Pruning oak trees in late winter may help prevent oak wilt disease which can be fatal. The beetle that transports the disease is not active during late winter. Pruning paint, when used immediately, may also help prevent the entry of the disease.
- Apply a liquid root-stimulator monthly to newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Peach and plum trees should be pruned to keep their "bowl" shape and remove water sprouts.

#### Garden Watch

- Remove by hand, broadleaf weeds such as clover, dandelions, henbit and chickweed in lawns and beds. Spot spray large areas with a broadleaf weed killer when temperatures are above 70 degrees. Read and follow labels carefully on any pesticide before using.

#### Odds and Ends

- Select and order bulbs for planting later in the year. Some varieties of jonquils recommended for this area are: 'Fortune', 'Thalia', 'Tete-a-Tete', 'Ice Follies' and 'Carlton'. They should be planted in the fall for spring blooms.
- This is a good time to have your soil tested in your lawn, vegetable and flower garden. Contact the Texas AgriLife Extension Service or the Ellis County Master Gardeners at 972-825-5175 for the necessary collection and mailing materials, or for more information.
- To help reduce harmful emissions that pollute clean air, repair and tune up your lawn mower and any other equipment powered by gasoline. Also, it is a good time to have your lawn mower blade professionally sharpened.
- Repair and/or tune up your lawn mower and any other power equipment.



### Interested in becoming a 2011 Expo Sponsor Or Expo Exhibitor?

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

**Reserve the date: March 26, 2011!**

## What is a Master Gardener?

By Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



Master Gardeners are trained members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers, and gardens. They are enthusiastic, willing to learn and to help others and be able to communicate with diverse groups of people.

Master Gardeners contribute time as volunteers, working through their Texas AgriLife Extension Service office to provide horticultural information to their communities.

### IS THE MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM FOR ME?

To help you decide if you should apply to be a Master Gardener, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I want to learn more about the culture and maintenance of many types of plants?
- Am I eager to participant in a practical and intense training program?
- Do I look forward to sharing my knowledge with people in my community?
- Do I have enough time to attend training and to complete the volunteer service?

### Training

If accepted into the Master Gardener Program you will attend a training course which offers a minimum of 56 hours of instructions that covers topics including: lawn care, ornamental trees and shrubs, insects, disease and weed management, soil and plant nutrition, vegetable gardening, home fruit production, garden flow-

ers, and water conservation. The course and study materials cost is \$150.00.

The Master Gardener training course will be held each Tuesday and Thursday throughout the month of February 2011. Hours will be from 8:30a.m. to 5:00p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Street, Waxahachie, Texas. Class size is limited and attendance is required at all sessions to complete the program.

### Volunteer Commitment

In exchange for training, participants are asked to volunteer at least **75 hours of service by November 1<sup>st</sup>** following training to earn the title of "Texas Master Gardener". The volunteer time will take place during the normal work week with the exception when we have the Annual Lawn & Garden Expo which is on a Saturday in the spring.

The type of service done by Master Gardeners varies according to community needs and the abilities and interest of the Master Gardener. Some Master Gardeners answer telephone requests for information related to gardening. Master Gardeners may speak to local groups and conduct workshops. They may help establish school and community garden projects, work with 4-H youth, or assist their agent with news or radio releases related to gardening. The Master Gardener Coordinator in the county Extension office decides how volunteer time can be best used. Master Gardeners are representatives of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in

all volunteer work related to the program; Master Gardeners follow the research-based recommendations of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. The title "Texas Master Gardener" can be used by volunteers only when engaged in activities sponsored by the Extension Service.

### Certification

Participants become certified Master Gardeners after they have completed the training course and fulfilled their volunteer commitment.

Application forms are available on the Ellis County Master Gardener website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) or by calling 972-825-5175. Classes fill quickly and applications are accepted on a first-come, first served basis. Applications must be returned by **January 3, 2011** after which you will be called to schedule an interview.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin. The Texas A & M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.



## Winter Bluebonnets

by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener

A bountiful wildflower season is a game of inches; in rainfall, that is. And Texas is in the midst of a drought-like season.

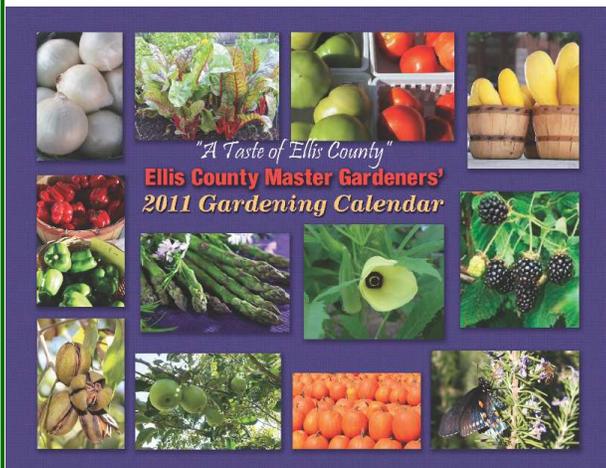
The wildflowers that many Texans first notice as springtime blossoms are actually the result of months of growth that start with seeds that are dropped with previous season's display.

By winter, the young plants that will produce spring flowers should be about the size of a dinner plate, said Damon Waitt,

senior botanist at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. He was out in the fields looking at the spring bloomers; "the rosettes are very, very small", he said. Although it is too early to predict 2011's spring flower display, he stated he didn't expect anything like last year's bountiful display.

"It's a good thing we had a good year last year, because that seed will last in the soil for several years," Waitt said. Hopefully next year we will have the right rain at the right time of the year. While the 2011 wildflower crop may pale in comparison to last year's presentation, the show will go on. "There's still going to be bluebonnets, but maybe not just the fields we'd like to see every year," Waitt said. "That's how the climate is."

## Master Gardener's 2011 Gardening Calendar



The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our 5<sup>th</sup> 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, 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 is now available at our many calendar sponsors listed below. **Please thank them for sponsoring this year's gardening calendar; without their participation, there would be no calendar.**

### Waxahachie

Ann's Health Food Center & Market  
 ARK Country Store  
 Boyce Feed & Grain  
 Carlisle Chevrolet Cadillac  
 Carrington Insurance, Agent Nita Wilson  
 City of Waxahachie  
 CNB of Texas  
 College Street Restaurant and Pub  
 Creative Quilters of Ellis County  
 Farmers Insurance, Agent Loyd Wilson  
 Gingerbread Press  
 The Dove's Nest

The Greenery  
 The Rock Pile  
 Waxahachie Civic Center  
 Waxahachie Daily Light  
 Larken Farms Orchard  
 Master Gardeners & AgriLife Extension  
 Natural Water Works  
 Pettigrew Academy  
 Roland Nursery & Landscape  
 Stone River Landscaping

### Midlothian

EarthTones Greenery

Midlothian Conference Center  
 Pam Daniel, Ebby Halliday  
 Travis Equipment

### Ennis

Ennis Chamber of Commerce  
 Ennis Garden Club (available at Apple Annie's  
 Garden Gate Floral and Gifts Shoppe)  
 Tex-Scapes Greenery

### Red Oak

Keith ACE Hardware, Red Oak



## 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](mailto:ellis-tx@tamu.edu). Applications are also available on our website [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com).

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



## Vegetable Gardening 101

By Robert Shugart, Ellis County Master Gardener

One of the most rewarding projects that a person can take on is to start a vegetable garden. It can be as simple as a designated end-of-the-flower-bed to a well-established plot. Whatever you do, get started.

Planning is very important because good preparation will save many hours of labor.

Locate the garden where it:

- Gets 8 or more hours of direct sun (free of competition from other plants)
- Is highly visible
- Is close to a water source
- Is not a low spot --- drainage is important
- Can be planted, tended, and harvested at the right time (for the plant, not the gardener)

Be sure to provide adequate space for things like squash and melons.

The end of the previous season would be a great time to select the area. Don't be too ambitious. The first year a 10 foot by 10 foot area will keep you busy and supply some nice treats for your table with a few to give to friends.

Next, turn the soil with a spading fork or a tiller. A spading fork will naturally limit the size of your garden! This should be done in the fall, preceding your spring garden, and should be done several times adding amendments as you go.

Amendments such as leaves, manure, and compost are all "Garden Gold". Adding 4 inches or more the first season and each fall thereafter is a wonderful way to keep it productive. Take advantage of dry spells during the winter to till and add amendments.

Contact the local Master Gardener office for information on vegetable gardening. Master Gardeners love to talk about gardening and can provide invaluable information regarding recommended varieties of vegetables to plant and how to plant and care for them.

Come December, order seed catalogues. It's a nice way to spend some cold winter hours. Plan the garden layout. Plan to put tall plants (tomatoes, corn, etc.) on the north side of the garden so you won't shade other plants. Run the rows east and

west to provide the most sun exposure per plant. Select locally recommended varieties to plant (either seed or transplants).



Large varieties of tomatoes planted in the northern states are not productive here due to the higher temperatures. The tomatoes we recommend tend to produce medium sized fruit but in abundance compared to northern varieties. Most gardeners have favorites. Some like to plant heirloom tomatoes (like Grandma used to plant). I have been known to put a couple at the end of rows --- don't expect big yields, but the flavor might be worth it.

Thinning row crops (like beans and peas) is difficult, but necessary to improve yields.

Mulching between rows and around vines can cut down on weeding.

Remember the most important thing that a gardener can plant in the garden is his or her feet!

## Holiday Treats for the Birds

By Diane Hopkins, Ellis County Master Gardener

The Christmas decorations are hung, presents for family and friends carefully wrapped and waiting under the tree, don't forget to include your backyard birds on your holiday list. Hanging treats outdoors and keeping fresh water available will keep those feathered friends coming to your yard through the cold days ahead.

The following edible ornaments can be made from easily obtained ingredients at home and will attract mockingbirds, wrens, cardinals, nuthatches, and goldfinches to your winter garden:

**Orange and Grapefruit Cups:** Halve citrus, and juice to remove pulp, being careful to keep the skins intact. Prick three equally spaced holes at the top of each cup and string with raffia or florists' wire. Let dry overnight and then fill with seeds, raisins, and millet, and hang on an outside tree.

**Cranberry Wreaths:** String cranberries on a 7" length of florists' wire. Form a circle and secure by twisting the ends together.

Decorate with a colorful bow before hanging.

**Pinecone Treats:** Coat pinecones with peanut butter and roll in birdseed. Tie string, ribbon, or raffia around each pinecone and hang in a tree.

**Suet Treats:** Melt 1 cup of crunchy peanut butter and 1 cup of lard over low heat. Stir in 2 cups of quick-cook oats, 1 cup of flour, 2 cups of cornmeal, and 1/3 cup sugar and cool in refrigerator. Put in mesh bags that onions come in. Tie with ribbon or raffia and hang on a tree branch.

Also, provide the birds with nesting materials by hanging a mesh bag on a fence in an out of the way place. Weave in a variety of nesting materials such as: hair from brushes, yarn, string, dried grass, etc. Watch the birds as they pull from these materials to build their nest.

The birds will repay your kindness all winter through with beautiful songs and their entertaining antics.



## Invite the Birds to Dinner

By Shirley Campbell  
Ellis County Master Gardener

Who among us doesn't enjoy watching the birds flitting around in the garden looking for something to eat or a place to rest and hide. Although we may not be able to identify all of them, most birds will enjoy the fruits produced on these plants that do well here. To attract birds to your garden have a diversity of plants. Using nature's own foods to attract wildlife is infinitely more gratifying than simply scattering store-bought seeds.

Today, the **American Beautyberry** has put on rose to purple colored berries in clusters all along the long radiating branches. Planted in mostly shade it becomes a very large shrub. The blossoms are non-descript but the berries are spectacular.

**Coral Honeysuckle** vine thrives in full sun. This native produces clusters of orange to scarlet fruit, up to ½ inch in diameter in late summer and fall.

In the dreary days of January, yellow grape-like clusters of blossoms appear on the **Leatherleaf Mahonia**. These blossoms turn into bluish/purple berries. Plant it in the shade and since it is prickly, keep it away from the sidewalk. This Chinese native is widely grown for its distinctive leathery, holly like, coarse-textured foliage.

The birds like the bluish/black fruits on **lantana**, especially the native Texas lantana. For the best bloom and then the fruit, lantanas should be planted in full sun.

The hollies, **Berries Jubilee**, **Burford** regular and dwarf, **needlepoint** or **willowleaf**, and **Nellie R. Stevens**, with their scarlet-red fruits all attract a broad spectrum of birds. Their fruits last far into the winter.

**Yaupon**, a large shrub or small tree, is a widely distributed native evergreen holly with 1/8 inch, translucent, glasslike, red berries that are produced in great abundance on female plants only.

**Possumhaw Holly**, or deciduous holly, is also a large shrub or small tree. Before frost, the foliage drops to expose branches

heavily laden with the yellow to orange to red fruits which persist until new growth begins in the spring if not eaten by birds or other wildlife. 'Warren's Red' bears the most fruit.

**Nandina domestica**, which can grow in sun or shade, has grape-like clusters of bright, red berries. Compound leaves turn wine-red in winter. Fruit appears in prominent, striking, grapelike clusters with individual bright red berries up to ¼ in. across in autumn and winter.

**Fatsia** has rounded clusters of berrylike fruits that turn black when ripe. Birds clean this plant of its fruit before many people see it in its ripened state. Fatsia has small creamy white blossoms in the fall and winter that turn in to the developing fruit. Looking for a dramatic plant that can take shade? This would be a great choice with its large 12 inch tropical-looking leaves.

**Chinese Photinia** berries grow in clusters. This large, dense shrub is the one photinia that we still recommend as it is not as susceptible to leaf and root diseases. The clusters consist of scarlet to red berries in fall and winter. As an added bonus, as the clusters dry, we can use them naturally or spray them with gold or silver and use as Christmas decorations.

Driving down the street during the winter, do you ever see a tree that looks like it has white beads all over it? That's the **Chinese Tallow tree**. White waxy seeds, usually three per pod, give the appearance of popcorn, and become quite prominent after leaves drop in the fall. Chinese tallow is somewhat tender in our area but mine has lasted for 30 years. The striking autumn color in reds, gold, yellow, and maroon is an added feature.

**Rusty blackhaw viburnum** is an excellent understory large shrub or small tree. Its dark blue fruits with powdery-white sheen are present in moderate numbers in the fall and are showier after the leaves fall. This native is best planted in the fall. It will give you an outstanding show of fall color with its brilliant hues of red, mauve, and orange. It can be used to soften the corner of your home, and because of its size would make a good patio or courtyard tree.

**Eastern Red Cedar**, a native juniper, has



¼ inch bluish, berry-like fruits present on only the female plants in fall and winter.

Another native tree is the **Mexican Plum** with its reddish purple to nearly black, crab apple-like fruits up to 1 – 1 ½ inches across that ripen in autumn. It signals the return of spring with its fragrant white blossoms.

**Virginia Creeper** is probably the most important vine that produces fruits eaten by birds. This native vine will grow in full sunlight to shade, will cling to walls and trunks, and grow into the canopies of trees. (Often confused with poison ivy which has leaves of 3, Virginia creeper has leaves of 5.) Dark blue fruits, ¼ inch in diameter are produced in long clusters in early autumn along with rosy red autumn foliage.

**Grapes** are a favorite of many fruit-eating birds along with **blackberries**. Because of their sugar content, they are a preferred food source of many birds.

Birds add something to the landscape that no human can provide. "A garden that has no wildlife has no soul."

Invite the birds in for dessert and serve up their favorites. They'll thank you.

## Landscape Gardening

By Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

### Ellis County Master Gardeners' 2011 Lawn and Garden Expo...

will be held on Saturday, March 26, 2011 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. This annual event will be held at the Waxahachie Civic Center, 1950 North I-35E, Waxahachie, Tx, 75165. The keynote speaker will be Neil Sperry and there will be other landscape gardening presentations by local Master Gardeners. There will be over 100 gardening-related exhibitors. You will be able to purchase plants: hanging baskets, perennials, roses and vegetables. The 4-H will provide a concession area. Free tickets are available from the sponsors of the Expo. The cost for children under 12 is free. The admission for everyone 12 and older is \$5.00 at the door.

### The Children's Room, 2011 Lawn and Garden Show, by Susan Guynes

Like most parents I am constantly looking for something to do with my daughter. I usually want the activity to be inexpensive, fun and have something for everyone. It is a bonus if my daughter learns something while she is having fun. To find such an activity I would look no further than the 2011 Lawn and Garden Show at the Waxahachie Civic Center the last weekend in March. This annual event is always a big hit with children and adults. The Lawn and Garden show not only provides booths and classes for adults, but a fun and educational area for the children. In the children's area you will find many different crafts and educational activities. The children will learn about composting, recycling, plants, insects, and birds. They will make useful garden crafts to take home as well as plant seeds that can be transplanted later into the garden. There are activities and crafts for preschoolers as well. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Bring your children and come join us at the 2011 Lawn and Garden show on Saturday March 26, 2011.

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a

website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com). Check this website for information on gardening in Ellis County, sign up for a monthly newsletter or access other websites including 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.

### Garden Checklist for January

- Continue to water and fertilize cool-weather annuals such as snapdragons, Bells of Ireland, stocks, larkspur, pansies, violas and sweet alyssum to encourage the best blooms. Now is an excellent time to transplant mature or established trees and shrubs while they are dormant.
- Make flower and vegetable garden plans now before the rush of spring planting. Time spent in armchair gardening before the fireplace will pay off in improved plant selection. Besides, it is fun to page through the garden catalogs and books while contemplating changes in your garden.
- Apply slow-release fertilizer to pansies and other cool season annuals. Distribute 5 pounds of cotton seed or alfalfa meal per 100 square feet of bed area or use commercial slow release fertilizer products according to label instructions.
- Check junipers and other narrow-leaf evergreens for bagworm pouches. The insect eggs over-winter in the pouch, and start the cycle again by emerging in the spring to begin feeding on the foliage. Hand removal and burning of the pouches reduce future damage.
- When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially when dealing with bare-root plants. The medium to small sizes (4 to 6 feet) are usually faster to become established and more effective in the landscape than the large sizes.
- Hold off on pruning bush roses until February or early March. Use good shears that will make clean cuts. Remove dead, dying, and weak canes. Leave 4 to 8 healthy canes, and remove approximately one-half of the top growth and height of the plant.
- When pruning shrubs, first prune out any dead or damaged branches; then thin out by removing about one-third of the canes or stems at ground level, removing the oldest canes only; and last, shape the rest of the plant, keeping in mind the natural shape of the plant. Water foliage plants as well as other containerized plants only when needed and not by the calendar.
- Now is the ideal time to select and plant grapes, fruit trees and berries. Contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension agent for localized variety recommendations. Prune peaches and grapes at this time.
- Herbaceous perennials and hardy ornamental grasses may be cut back at this time. It may be difficult to assess the extent of freeze damage on citrus and semi-tropical plants until warm weather arrives. When new growth begins damaged material can be removed.



## Vegetable Gardening

By Pat Dockins  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### Gardening in January

I used to think that there was nothing to do in January as far as vegetable gardening goes. Ooh no, far from it. Let's see ... where to begin.

First, test your garden soil. You can do this by taking several samples, mixing them together and send your mixture to Texas A&M for testing. You can get a mailing envelope from your county Extension office or you can get a small testing kit at most nurseries and do it yourself. It won't be as totally accurate as the sample sent to Texas A&M but will give you a fairly good idea what your soil needs. If your soil needs amending, now is the time to do it.

Take inventory of what you grew last year. How did it do? Did you like it? Did the family like it? Grow it again if it worked for you. Plan your garden site. Remember to rotate your plants. Move those tomatoes to another spot in the garden. But for Pete's sake, try something new this year. I tried Kohlrabi for the first time last year. It sure is a strange looking plant but I found I like it well enough.

January and February are the best times to plant cool-season crops. You may need to cover your new seedlings a few times when a hard freeze is expected or maybe even have to replant but the effort is well worth it. Be sure you pick varieties that are for spring. William D. Adams, Horticulturist and author, recommends that you look for plant varieties that claim to be "slow-bolting" or even to have "Spring" in their name.

Now is the time to plant fruit trees, pecan trees, grapes, berries, asparagus, onions, as well as garlic. Sow directly in the garden English peas, beets, carrots, radishes, cress, bok choy, and herbs such as dill and parsley. Fertilize your asparagus bed late this month. We plant tomato seeds in the greenhouse the last week of January for spring transplants.

Final note. As I write this I'm also preparing dinner. I've sliced a bowl of ripe tomatoes that we picked green just before the first freeze, drizzled them with a little olive oil, sprinkle fresh basil around them, a little sea salt....Mmmmmm good. If you grow your own vegetables at least you know what pesticides have been put on them (on mine - none). It really is worth all the work to have a garden. It doesn't have to be large to produce plenty for small family. In fact, there's a book entitled *Square Foot Gardening* by Mel Bartholomew, published by Rodale Press. Check it out at your local library or Extension Office.

## Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### January, 2011 Herb of the Month

January is a good time to garden vicariously from my kitchen window looking out over my herb beds and perennial garden, but today is forecasted to be the last of balmy weather with tomorrow bringing north winds and freezing temperatures. So this is an opportunity to get out, do some cleaning up, pruning of late summer bloomers (do not prune spring or early summer blooming plants now) and if I feel really energetic maybe even get some compost spread. My three bins are piled high with rich, black organic matter. A one-half inch coat will protect the tender seedlings of chervil, dill, cilantro and chives that are beginning to emerge.

With our mild climate there is much to enjoy in the January herb garden. Some of my favorite treats are the edible flowers blooming now. Pansies, sweet violets and viola tricolor or "Johnny-jump-ups" are adding color to the landscape. If you are organic and have not applied synthetic pesticides to your garden these colorful petals are a culinary treat. Scatter them in salads or sprinkle them

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

over cottage cheese, steamed vegetables and soups. Sugared petals add a special treat to pastries. Other edible flowers found in the winter garden include rosemary petals, redbuds, dianthus (pinks), grape hyacinth, dandelion, and tulips.

**Flower Butter:** Combine one cup of pesticide-free, chopped flower petals with one stick of room temperature butter and one teaspoon lemon juice. Mix well, cover and refrigerate. Use on biscuits, bread, vegetables, etc.

**Sugared Violet and Pansy Petals:** Pick clean, pesticide-free violets and pansies. Mix egg-white substitute or the white of one pasteurized egg. With a small artist's brush coat the flowers with the egg white. Sprinkle the flowers with ultra-fine sugar and place on a wax-paper covered tray. Set aside at room temperature to dry for several days. After completely dry, flowers may be stored between paper towels in a plastic container in your freezer. They will keep for several months.

Before you eat any flower, do your homework to make sure it is safe. Here are some guidelines to remember before you eat any flower:

- Always consult a good reference book
- Eat only flowers that have **not** been sprayed with pesticides
- Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries or those picked from the side of the road
- Eat only the flower petals. Remove pistils and stamens
- Wash all flowers before eating. Spray with gentle mist in the garden the day before picking
- Use small quantities, one species at a time.
- If you have allergies, introduce edible flowers gradually



## It's January - What Else Need to be Done?

By Diane Hopkins  
Ellis County Master Gardener

- Plant bare-root fruit trees and landscape plants, don't fertilize these newly set out plants until they have started to grow, and only lightly the first year.
- Transplant established landscape plants that you want to move to a more suitable location in your garden.
- Pansies, dianthus and snapdragons can still be planted in a sunny, well-drained bed.
- Plant ground covers in shady areas that didn't grow grass well last summer.
- Deciduous trees may be pruned according to their natural shape now that they are dormant. Never top any tree, including crape myrtles.
- Mistletoe can be pruned from trees infested with this parasite.
- Secure climbing rose canes to prevent damage from winter winds. Don't prune climbing roses until after they complete blooming in the spring.
- In the fruit and vegetable garden remove and discard dried fruit from fruit trees and the ground below to reduce disease problems in the spring and summer.
- Clean out any frozen or spent vegetable plants from your garden and work two to three inches of compost into your spring garden site.
- If daytime temperatures approach 70 degrees, you may apply a broadleaf weed killer to eliminate henbit, dandelions, chickweed and other non-grassy weeds in lawn turf. Always refer to the product label for proper uses.
- Apply dormant oil spray to scale-prone plants and also to kill over-wintering pest.
- Check your narrow-leaved evergreen plants for bagworm egg pouches and remove by hand to avoid an infestation of this damaging pest later this year; when dealing with bagworms an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
- Late January is the time to apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to asparagus beds to promote vigorous cane growth.
- Place seed orders now for arrival in time for spring planting.
- Select and order gladiolus corms for early spring planting at two-week intervals to prolong flowering.
- Take care to continue watering your lawn and fall-planted bulbs once a week, if it doesn't rain, to guard against cold damage to the roots.
- Encourage birds to visit your garden by providing food and water.
- Bring in tender container plants to protect from forecast winter freezes.
- If you have a water garden, keep the water circulating to keep the surface from freezing over as the temperature drops below freezing. It's also important not to feed the goldfish and koi at this time because their metabolism slows as the water temperature drops.
- Clean, sharpen and oil garden tools and pruning equipment in preparation for spring use.

To obtain additional gardening information visit our website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) or call the extension office at 972-825-5175.