



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VII, Issue One

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

January, 2013

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), click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE! Susan Clark, Editor

## What's Happening in January

In 2013, why not expand your horizons? There are many opportunities in our area for learning more about gardening and the environment. The following organizations offer classes and education. Please visit their websites for more information.

**BRIT.** Classes include: Edible Flowers, Mushrooms, Organics, Herbs, and many more. Visit <http://www.brit.org/events/learners> for more info. Fees vary, some include lunch.

**The Dallas Arboretum.** Just a few subjects include: Square Foot Gardening, Attracting Birds, Landscape Design, Tomatoes, Organics, Beekeeping, Creative Arts, and many more. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/AdultEducation/index.htm> for details and registration. Fees vary.

**Garden Inspirations.** Classes in January include: Greenhouse Basics, Soil and Garden Prep, Jams, Pickling, and more. For complete details and to register for classes, visit [www.gardeninspirations-tx.com](http://www.gardeninspirations-tx.com). Class fee is \$40, unless otherwise noted.

### Botanical Research Institute of Texas

1700 University Drive, Fort Worth

Phone: (817) 332-4441 ♦ Website: <http://www.brit.org/>

**Opens Saturday, January 12. "Native to this Place: The Plants and Prairies of North Central Texas" exhibit.** Come see the collections and get to know little bluestem, summer gayfeather, and Engelmann's daisy; compare buffalo grass to Bermuda grass; and learn more about the value of fire and the danger of invasive species. Be introduced to the beautiful and valuable plants of our prairie heritage. The exhibit will also feature a Kid's Zone for children to learn fun facts about the prairie. Admission is free.

### Indian Trail Master Naturalists

For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email [ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:ellis-tx@tamu.edu)

**Saturday, January 5, Christmas Bird Count.** Trinity River Audubon Center: Birders of all levels are needed for this important effort. RSVP for a team assignment and details. Please contact Sahar Sea at [ssea@audubon.org](mailto:ssea@audubon.org) or call (21) 309-5813 to volunteer.

**Saturday, January 12, "For the Birds-Tree Decorating".** Free and open to the public at the Waxahachie Sims Library, 515 West Main Street, Waxahachie at 3pm; and at the Red Oak Old City Park, 100 Live Oak Street, Red Oak at 4:30pm. Make and bring your own "biodegradable materials only" Bird Treats. For Bird Treat recipes and more information, visit <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/>.

**Monday, January 28, 6pm-8pm, Chapter Monthly Meeting and "Open House-Project Fair".** The program will include: 1. An Introduction to Master Naturalist in Ellis

(Continued on page 7)

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 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>It's Jan., What Needs to be Done?</i>	2
<i>Wildflower of the Month</i>	3
<i>Herb of the Month</i>	4
<i>Starting the New Year</i>	5
<i>Landscape Gardening</i>	6
<i>Texas Native Tree: Possumhaw</i>	7
<i>January Considerations</i>	8





### EARTH-KIND® LANDSCAPE DESIGN

**W**ise plant selection and careful attention to improving environmental conditions through soil preparation, proper after-planting care, and efficient irrigation practices are essential. There are no hard and fast rules, since conditions vary from location to location. Some experimentation will be necessary, but by following basic Earth-Kind® principles, your chances for success will be greatly increased.

To learn more about Earth-Kind® Landscape Design, click on the Resource tab at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) and click on Earth-Kind® Publications.



### SOIL TESTING

**T**his is a good time to have the soil tested in your lawn, vegetable, and flower garden to see what nutrients may be needed. Contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners or the Ellis County AgriLife Extension Office at (972) 825-5175 for the necessary collection and mailing supplies, or for more information.

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

### Planting

- ✧ Transplant small trees, shrubs, and perennials to new locations while they are dormant so they will be established before the heat and drought of summer. Water the root ball well before digging.
- ✧ In mid-month, plant pepper, tomato, and warm weather annual seeds in flats. They need bright light and warm temperatures (60 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit). Use grow lights for best results.
- ✧ Sow sugar snap peas and plant onions in well-prepared soil.

### Fertilizing and Pruning

- ✧ Prune trees, including live oaks and red oaks, to remove dead, 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.
- ✧ Peach and plum trees should be pruned to stimulate lateral branches and keep their "bowl" shape.

### Garden Watch

- ✧ Remove by hand, broadleaf weeds such as clover, dandelions, henbit, and chickweed in lawns and beds. If necessary, spot spray large areas of the lawn with a broadleaf weed killer when temperatures are above 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Be careful not to spray desirable plants. Read and follow labels carefully before using any pesticide.

### Planning

- ✧ The starting point for every successful Earth-Kind® landscape is a good plan, preferably on paper and not just in your mind. The process involved in drawing up a landscape design will:
  - ➔ Help you understand, organize, and develop the site for the best use and enjoyment;
  - ➔ Create a visual relationship between the house/business and the site;
  - ➔ Reduce the overall maintenance level; and
  - ➔ Preserve and protect the environment.



## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



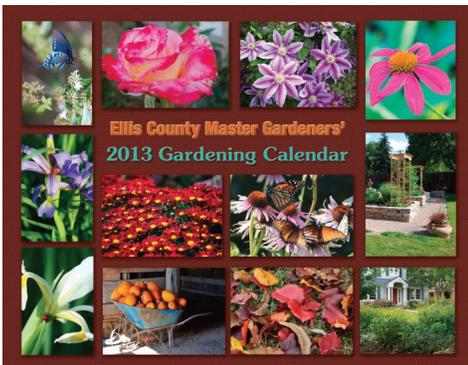
**Prairie Verbena** - Verbena Family (Verbenaceae)  
*Verbena Bipinnatifida* Nutt.

**Region:** 1–10 (Ellis Co. is Region 4)

**Size:** 12–18 inches

**Blooms:** January–December, Perennial

Usually no more than a foot high and often reclining, prairie verbena sometimes paints large areas lavender, pink, bluish, or purple. Plants are hairy, with square stems. Trumpet-shaped with five flattened lobes, the tiny flowers are clustered into half-globes. Opposite, stalked leaves are divided twice into finely cut foliage that adds a lacy background to the rounded flower clusters. Prairie verbena quickly covers barren areas, but is crowded out as other species invade. It is an important nectar plant for butterflies, blooming throughout the year. It often roots from reclining lower stem joints. Texas has thirty-six species of verbena, many essentially similar.



### Master Gardeners 2013 Gardening Calendar

The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our 7th annual gardening calendar.

Free copies are available at our many calendar sponsors listed below. Please thank them for sponsoring this year's gardening calendar; without their sponsorship, there would be no calendar.

#### Ennis

Tex-Scapes Greenery  
Ennis Chamber of Commerce

#### Midlothian

EarthTones Greenery  
Midlothian Conference Center

#### Maypearl

The Cowboy Bank of Texas  
Maypearl Insurance Agency

#### Red Oak

Keith's ACE Hardware

#### Waxahachie

Anne's Health Food Center & Market  
ARK Country Store  
Boyce Feed & Grain  
Brazos Valley Equipment Company  
CNB Bank of Texas - all facilities  
Carlisle Chevrolet Cadillac

#### City of Waxahachie

College Street Restaurant & Pub  
Creative Quilts of Ellis County  
Garden Inspirations  
Gingerbread Press  
KBEC 1390  
Larken Farms Orchard  
Pam Daniel, Ebby Halliday  
Living Magazine  
Roland's Nursery & Landscape (both locations)  
Travis Equipment  
The Dove's Nest  
The Greenery  
The Rock Pile  
Universal Outdoor Design  
Waxahachie Civic Center  
Waxahachie Daily Light

**Save The Date!**  
**Saturday, March 16, 2013**



## Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### January Herb of the Month – Teas Around the World

It's January, and of course, there is much the gardener can be doing in the garden on the few balmy days offered. But my plan is to curl up in front of the fire with a cup of hot herbal tea and tackle all those seed catalogs and garden gift magazines that arrived during the holidays. If you have ordered anything on-line, your email is probably overloaded with garden sales as well.

So let's talk about teas before we brew up a pot.

Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) is the plant whose leaves are used to produce our popular beverage tea. White tea, green tea, oolong, and black tea are all harvested from this species, but are processed differently to create different levels of oxidation.

Originally grown only in China, the British set out to steal the seeds and plants and transport them to British-owned India for cultivation. The Indian Himalaya mountain range resembled China's best tea growing regions. The high altitude, rich soil, cloudy mists, and frequent frosts offered an ideal environment. Today the plant is grown throughout the world in tropical and subtropical climates.

If you enjoy a good adventure story, espionage, and history, consider reading "For All the Tea in China" by Sarah Rose. This is the story of British botanist, Robert Fortune and his bold travels into the forbidden areas of China on behalf of the British East India Company.

It was England's monopoly on tea that caused the Boston Tea Party and inspired the colonists' frantic search for suitable herbs to replace the beloved *Camellia sinensis*. Herbal teas are made

from one or a blend of plants. Some of my favorite herbs for tea are as follows:

**Anise hyssop** (*Agastache foeniculum*) is a perennial with a delicate blend of mint and sweet anise. Native Americans drank the tea for respiratory problems and chest pains.

**Catnip and Catmint** (*Nepeta* spp.) are members of the mint family. The flavor is minty and has a calming effect on people.

**Chamomile** (*Chamaemelum nobile*) or Roman is most suited to the Texas tea garden. It is an annual in the South and has an apple flavor. The small, daisy-like flow-



ers are used to make a soothing tea.

**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*) is best used fresh in teas. Nicholas Culpeper, the 17<sup>th</sup> century British herbalist, wrote that lemon balm "causeth the mind and heart to become merry, and driveth away all troublesome cares."

**Lemon verbena** (*Aloysia triphylla*) is a tender perennial whose leaves hold their flavor when dried making it one of my favorite winter tea herbs. It is also good as a sun tea.

**Mints** (*Mentha* spp.) are by far the most popular and easy to grow tea herbs. Flavors include apple, chocolate, ginger, grapefruit, orange, peppermint, pineapple, and spearmint. Often drunk after dinner, mint teas are said to promote digestion.

**Monarda** (*Monarda didyma*), also called bee balm, bergamot, and Oswego tea, is a perennial in the mint family. The Native Americans of the Oswego, New York area taught the colonists to make tea from this native plant as a substitute for English tea. Historical uses have included relieving stomach problems and soothing coughs and sore throats.

**Pineapple sage** (*Salvia elegans*) has a wonderful pineapple flavor. The leaves are best used fresh.

**Jamaica** (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) has a tart, cranberry-like flavor. Sweetener is often added. The tea contains vitamin C and is used traditionally as a mild medicine. The flower is usually steeped along with ginger, in boiling water, strained and pressed to squeeze all the juice out then sugar added and served over ice or hot.

Dried hibiscus flowers called calyces are available in health food stores and Mexican markets. Hibiscus tea was popularized in the United States by Celestial Seasonings as "Red Zinger" in 1972.

This past summer I found a Jamaica plant. It was my first opportunity to grow a hibiscus tea plant. I have harvested the seeds and plan to try growing more in the coming season. If you are fortunate enough to find a plant, protect it from cold as it is a tropical and will not survive our zone 8 climate.

There is much written about the benefits of traditional tea and herbal teas. So consider making flavorful blends, brew up a pot, add a sweetener if you like, and join me as we plan for our beautiful herb garden and all the wonderful plants we will find at the 2013 Master Gardener Expo on March 16.





## 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 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 email or telephone call, if you leave a message at (972) 825-5175.

### All Plants Have a Place in Water Efficient Landscapes

Dr. Douglas F. Welsh, Professor & Extension Horticulturist, Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Every plant in the nursery or garden center truly has a place in an EarthKind®, "Green", or Xeriscape landscape. It's not which plant you use, but where you put it. Three different plant zones can be incorporated into a water efficient landscape:



◆ **Regular Watering Zone**—Plants in this zone would require watering once every week or more, once established, in the absence of rain.

◆ **Occasional Watering Zone**—These plants would require watering once every two or three weeks, once established, in the absence of rain.

◆ **Natural Rainfall Zone**—Plants in this zone would require only natural rainfall, once established.

By zoning the plants in the landscape according to their water requirements, you prevent the situation of having to overwater one plant type to meet the needs of another.

Every region of Texas has a palette of plants to choose from which are adapted to the soil, temperature extremes, and pest problems of the area. The challenge for both the professional and amateur gardener is to categorize the plants based on expected water requirements. By using the categories of natural rainfall, occasional watering, and regular watering, most gardeners can find the best place in the garden for the plants in their region.

For example, in much of Texas (areas of 30+ inches of rainfall), the following categorization is often used:

◆ **Regular Watering Zone:** Turf grasses and annual flowers

◆ **Occasional Watering Zone:** Perennial flowers and tender woody shrubs and vines

◆ **Natural Rainfall Zone:** Tough woody shrubs and vines, and all trees

All plants do have a place in a Xeriscape, "Green" or EarthKind® landscape. Visit your nursery or garden center today and start creating your own beautiful, water-conserving landscape.

### Garden Checklist for January/February

• 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.

• Make flower and vegetable garden plans now before the rush of spring planting. Time spent in armchair gardening 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.

• Sow seeds in flats or containers to get a jump on plant growth before hot weather arrives. Petunias, begonias, and impatiens should be sown in January or February. Warm temperature plants such as tomatoes, peppers, marigolds, and periwinkles should be sown in late January or early February.

• Apply slow release fertilizer to pansies and other cool season annuals. Distribute five 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.

• Prepare beds and garden area for

spring planting. Till in several inches of compost, composted pine bark or similar material.

• Select and order gladiolus corms for February/March planting. Plant at two week intervals to prolong flowering period.

• Check junipers and other narrow-leaf evergreens for bagworm pouches. The insect eggs overwinter 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.

• The life of poinsettias and other holiday season plants can be prolonged with proper care. Keep the soil moist, but provide drainage so that excess moisture can flow from the pot. Keep the plant out of range of heating ducts and away from heating units. Keep in a cool room at night, preferably at 60 to 65 degrees F.

• Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly the first year.

• When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially when dealing with bare-root plants. The medium to small sizes (four to six feet) are usually faster to become established and more effective in the landscape than the large sizes.

• Hold off on pruning bush roses and grapes at this time until mid-February or until early March in northern parts of the State.

• 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.

## Texas Native Tree: Possumhaw

By Marilyn Simmons  
Ellis County Master Gardener Intern

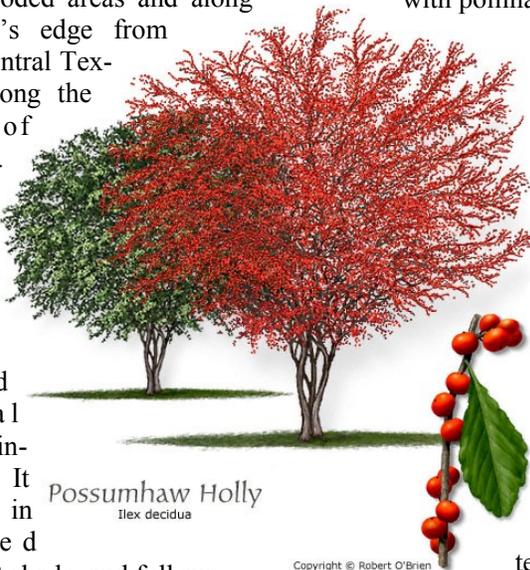


When looking for a specimen tree with incredible winter color, the Texas native Possumhaw may fit the bill. The female *Ilex Decidua* matures in height between 12 and 15 feet. This deciduous holly fruits in the fall and berries mature to a flaming red color making this is an excellent specimen tree for attracting birds.

This native tree is found naturally growing in wooded areas and along the water's edge from East to Central Texas and along the Gulf of Mexico.

Possumhaw will grow in sandy loam, caliche, clay, and seasonal poor drainage areas. It does well in dappled shade, part shade, and full sun.

Possumhaw is often harvested from the wild, and balled and burlapped. It is also propagated from fresh seed, scarified, and double-stratified seed. Some trees are propagated from semihardwood cuttings. This specimen tree can be found in local nurseries.



Possumhaw Holly  
*Ilex decidua*

Copyright © Robert O'Brien

To select a female tree, look for flowers or berries. If planting outside of the possumhaw's natural habitat, male and female must be planted to insure the production of berries.

If planting close to a natural habitat such as the woods, there is generally no problem with pollination. Non-native hollies such as "Burford" and other berrying hollies have been known to aid with pollination.

The berries provide extended color for the landscape from late fall until new leaves appear in the spring. However if berries are disappearing, it may be due to winter feeding from our feathered friends the Cedar Waxwings, Blue Jays, Robins, and Thrashers, among others.

Nurseries typically carry possumhaw hollies selected for berries that will hold color all winter. This tree is often

called a deciduous yaupon because its size, shape and smooth, pale gray multi-trunks make it look similar to the yaupon in the summer. To recognize the difference, note that the possumhaw leaves are larger and thinner than those of the yaupon holly.

When my husband and I bought our property near Rockett, we had several

possumhaw on the property that the berries were more orange than red. I have located several growing in the wild across Ellis County. Any tree that grows well in the wild will do well in your yard. *Information for this article was taken from Native Texas Plants by Sally Wasowski.*

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

and Navarro Counties 2. Who we are and what we do—our Projects and Opportunities. The program is free and follows the 6 p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. \* **Note new meeting location:** Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Parkway, Red Oak.

### Cedar Ridge Preserve

7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas

[www.audubondallas.org](http://www.audubondallas.org)

**Saturday, January 12, 9am or 11am, Nature Walks by MN Jim Varnum.**

**Birding at Cedar Ridge Preserve—9am** Jim leads a leisurely walk through forest and field for young and old, novices and experts. Expect to see winter residents, hawks, etc. **"The Color of Winter"—11am** Jim leads a walk through forest and field to observe the Color of Winter.

Call (214) 543-2055 for more info.

**Saturday, January 19, 9am—12pm, Conservation in Action Workday.** Volunteers help remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. Water, snacks, pruning shears, shovels, and work gloves provided. Contact: [info\\_CRP@yahoo.com](mailto:info_CRP@yahoo.com).

### Texas Discovery Gardens

3601 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Dallas

[TexasDiscoveryGardens.org](http://TexasDiscoveryGardens.org)

**Saturday, January 19, 10am—12pm, Landscaping for Wildlife.** Gardening is for the birds...and lizards, squirrels, and more! Your garden can become a buffet for wildlife. Learn how with Director of Horticulture Roger Sanderson. Check the website for pricing and registration info.



**Interested in becoming a 2013 Expo Sponsor Or Expo Exhibitor?**

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

**Reserve the date: March 16, 2013!**

## January Considerations

By Marilyn Simmons

### Design

We are often restricted to the indoors during the winter making it a great time to plan and design a landscape area. Simply map out the area on grid paper and have fun researching plants that will work in that area.

Remember to consider the sun or lack of sun in the area you are planning to plant. Always know the mature size of the plant, shrub or perennial and allow enough room for maturity.

Native plants or plants well adapted to North Central Texas will ensure success. Consider the possibility of using a rainwater collection system if possible in the proposed landscaped area.

### Vegetable Gardens

It is time to prep the vegetable gardens. If debris has not been removed from the garden, pull stalks now and compost everything except old tomato vines.

Add one to two inches of mushroom compost and add dry molasses and granulated sul-po-mag to provide a quick food source for the soil micro-life. This is a good time to turn or till the soil. Look

at your local nursery for bundles of onion slips. Burgundy, 1015Y, and White or Yellow Granix are some of the varieties to watch for. Plant one to three inches apart for slicing onions in the spring.

### Trees

The absolute best time to plant shade trees is in the cold months. Be sure to select trees from a reliable nursery. Considerations for the best selection should include designated location, mature height and width, fall color, spring flower, and whether the

tree is deciduous or evergreen. Acorns, nuts, and seed droppings may be a factor, as well.

Fast growing trees such as an Ash or Bradford Pear may result in a quick shade tree, but remember they will be more susceptible to insect and wind damage because they have softer wood and have about a 20 year life span. Oak trees are hard wood and have a much longer life span.

### Birding

Most gardeners not only enjoy a little bird watching, but maintain bird feed-

ers and bird houses to attract birds for pest management. It is time to repair feeders and birdhouses. Remember to clean out the bluebird boxes. Simply remove the bird nest and shake out the droppings left from last season's fledglings.

Take a bar of Ivory soap and run it up and down the inside of the box. This will help to prevent the parasites that affect the young birds. Keep birding reference books on hand to identify your feathered friends.



### Rain Water Collection

Before the spring rains, be sure to check out your rainwater systems to make sure everything is in working order. If you have not installed rain barrels or rain collection systems, this would be the optimal time to get some installed and catch your "free water supply."

Check out local rain collection classes in your area. The city of Waxahachie, in conjunction with the Master Gardeners, frequently offer classes to construct your own rain barrel collection system. Plants thrive on rain water and water conservation is very important!



## ECMGA Amateur Photo Contest

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association announces its annual photo contest is under way beginning September 1, 2012. **Last date for submissions is March 1, 2013.**

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 to our 2012 Expo Sponsors!

### Gold Sponsors



### Silver Sponsors



### Bronze Sponsors

Waxahachie Civic Center

### Green Sponsors

- AmeriGrafix
- Boyce Feed & Grain
- CNB of Texas
- Ennis Garden Club
- Holcim (Texas) LP
- Nature's Guide
- RiverMist Pools & Spas
- Roland's Nursery & Landscape
- Tex-Scapes Greenery

Please Support These 2012 Expo Sponsors!

