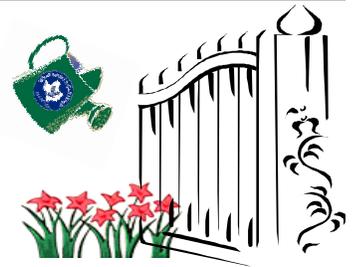




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume V, Issue 2

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

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

Melinda Kocian, editor/Susan Clark, co-editor

The Ellis County Master Gardeners
11th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo
Saturday, March 26, 2011 ♦ 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Waxahachie Civic Center





Gold Sponsors











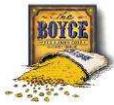








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 Contact: James Kocian
 972-814-0699 or
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Listen to KBEC.....

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

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Visit the above sponsors for free tickets!

**For further information on the EXPO
Please visit our website at www.ecmga.com**

It's March - What Needs to be Done?



Squash

Photo by
Linda Moxley



Squash

Photo by Pam Daniel

Squash Casserole By Pam Daniel

½ stick margarine
1 onion chopped
2 lbs. squash
½ pt. no-fat sour cream
1 pkg. cornbread stuffing mix
hot pepper sauce to taste
2 cans low-fat cream-of-chicken-soup

Cook/steam squash; mash, salt and pepper to taste. Save 1 ½ cups cornbread stuffing. In a large bowl, melt margarine with onions and cook until tender. Add sour cream, soup, hot pepper sauce and rest of stuffing. Add mashed squash to mixture. Spray baking dish with Pam. Sprinkle a thin layer of stuffing mix on bottom of pan. Pour squash mixture into pan. Top with remaining stuffing mix and grated cheese. Bake 30 minutes at 325° F.

Planting

- Annuals started from seed in January can be planted in late March. Wait until after March 14th to plant tomatoes and peppers. They should be hardened off (gradually exposed to outside temperatures) before putting in the ground. Cover if frost or freeze is predicted.
- Sow seeds of warm-season vegetables such as beans, corn, squash and melons mid- to late-March. Wait until April to plant okra.
- Plant herbs and perennials in raised beds with soil amended with organic matter.
- This is the time to plant warm-season annuals (begonias, marigolds, and impatiens) from four-inch pots.
- Castor beans and cosmos can be planted from seed.
- Vines, including hyacinth bean, Cyprus vine, black-eyed Susan vine, potato vine, Malabar spinach and others can be grown from seeds to climb a trellis, or arbor.

Pruning and Fertilizing

- Prune spring-flowering shrubs and vines such as quince, azaleas, forsythia, bridal wreath (*Spiraea*), Lady Banks rose, Carolina jessamine and coral honeysuckle immediately after they finish blooming.
- Remove dead top growth (Bermuda

grass only) by lowering mower blade one or two notches.

- Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to pecans now, and again in April and May.
- Begin fertilizing roses with plant food specifically designed for roses.
- All trees, shrubs, vines, and ground-covers can be fed with an all-nitrogen fertilizer.

Garden Watch

- As needed, control black spot, powdery mildew, and thrips on roses with an appropriate fungicide or systemic insecticide. Use a stream of water or an insecticidal soap on aphids.
- When a pesticide is needed, use the least toxic one first.
- If needed, apply a pre-emergent on lawns to prevent spring and summer broadleaf and grassy weeds. A weed and feed fertilizer is not recommended because it is too early to fertilize lawns.

Odds and Ends

- Install a drip irrigation system in your vegetable garden and mulched areas of the landscape.
- Spread compost around perennials and add mulch.
- Inspect the irrigation system to make sure it is operating properly. Replace or repair sprinkler heads and adjust spray patterns to reduce runoff.

Tips for Squash

Given to the pilgrims as "askutasquash", we get the modern name "squash". The Indian word means "eaten raw". Summer squash is an excellent source of manganese and vitamin C and a very good source of magnesium, vitamin A (notably through its concentration of carotenoids, including beta-carotene), fiber potassium, folate, copper, riboflavin and phosphorus.



Interested in becoming a 2011 Expo Exhibitor?

Contact James Kocian at
expo.ecmga@yahoo.com

Reserve the date: March 26, 2011!

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



March – The Month of Wait and See

Having spent the past week surveying the damage to my herb garden caused by the extreme cold, this month's column will cover what you should and should **not** be doing in your herb garden.

February and March are always my months of "wait and see". There are many herbs listed as tender perennials in North Texas that will not survive three days and nights of below freezing, no matter how much mulch you applied or how carefully you covered your plants. Then again we gardeners are naturally full of hope. Isn't that one of the definitions of a gardener? Following are my plans for herb gardening in March.

Bay trees show some damage to the outer leaves but I will leave that alone until after our last frost date which is mid March. We don't want to prune and encourage new growth with winter still here.

Calendula: These pretty edible flowers suffered some freeze damage but are already showing new growth and bloom buds.

Chives, both onion and garlic are a slimy mess right now but new growth will emerge with warmer days. Don't uncover until mid to late March.

Cilantro, Dill and Parsley: I always plant seeds in the fall and enjoy adding a few sprigs of these early greens to salads in March. Unfortunately these little babies did not survive the deep cold. So I will reseed this month. If it remains cool the seeds will not germinate until we are into longer periods of warm weather. As I've told you before, I'm a lazy gardener, so I scatter the seeds directly on the prepared soil, cover with a light layer of top soil and go back to my rocking chair. Some of the seeds will make it, of that I am sure.

Green and Bronze Fennel are up about twelve inches and don't seem to have been bothered by the cold. In addition to great anise flavor, this plant is a favorite dinner for the black swallowtail butterfly caterpillar.



Lavender: No matter what the season, I can't seem to keep lavender plants alive. The late heavy rains last fall stressed all of the plants and one by one they curled up and died. I don't believe the freeze had anything to do with their demise. Only a few are still looking healthy. Try Spanish lavender which is recommended for its beauty in the garden not its sweet aroma, Grosso, a highly disease resistant variety, and Hidcote which is a smaller plant. The greatest loss of lavender is wet feet rather than cold.

Lemongrass always looks dead now but do not remove the long dried grass until after our last average frost date around the middle of March then cut back. New shoots will quickly appear.

Oreganos in my garden were the surprise loss. I grow many varieties and all suffered damage to their leaves. Peeking under the dead leaves I find good green growth so expect the plants to survive but I will wait until late in the month to trim

them back by about one third.

Rosemary plants are showing damage also. The creeping varieties are more susceptible to freeze damage and may need to be replaced but upright rosemary should need just a good haircut later to stimulate new growth.

Sage plants will need to be cut back in early March. New growth will appear as the days get longer and warmer. Expect beautiful bright blue flower spikes in late spring.

Thyme should have enjoyed the cold snap. The leaves tend to turn red in the winter and the flavor is not as intense but a trim and warm weather will get the flavorful oils flowing.

So again, as you have heard from the other Ellis County Master Gardeners, February and March are a time of wait-and-see. There is work to be done but patience is the key to success in the spring garden.

Master Gardener Seminars

(all Seminars will be held in the Crape Myrtle Room)



“Make your Landscape you Special Place” - 10:00 a.m.

Presented by Nancy Fenton

With a back ground in agriculture, through summers and fall weekends helping out on family dairy farms by pumping water and planting trees, Nancy has come to gardening naturally. With a degree in education from Oklahoma State University and various public school teaching experiences, she has learned to tailor her talks to her audiences.

In summer of 2001, with Mike retired, both children grown and started on their own families, they decided to make the move to Waxahachie to be closer to their daughter and her family. Activities in the community haven't really let up with her organizational skills in demand at the 1st United Methodist Church, Habitat for Humanity, Friends of the Library and Master Gardeners. She has been writing monthly articles for *“The Now”* magazines with distribution in 3 counties to an estimated 500,000 readers since 2003. She still enjoys her own yard, planting over 200 daffodils each year.

“Perennials” - 11:00 a.m.

By Shirley Campbell

Shirley has been an Ellis County Master Gardener for 14 years. She has been active in most areas; past President of the organization in 2009, is now a charter member, working with the intern training classes every February and work on all the various projects around Ellis County.

Using Power Point, Shirley has done many presentations on annuals and perennials. She has been a member of the Master Gardener Board for a number of years. Shirley lives in Sardis-Lone Elm area and has four children.



“Wildscapes” - 1:00 p.m.

By Sandra Jones

Sandra Jones became a Master Gardeners in 2006 and a Master Naturalist in 2007. I wanted to know more about companion plantings. I love learning and I enjoy the education from Texas A & M , where all of our curriculum is based. We gardeners are always learning and we have the opportunity to share our knowledge with the public. I now have a vegetable garden, butterfly garden, wildlife habitat area and my passion are my Azaleas. I grow the Encore varieties and in the near future will be planting the Red Ruffle variety. My love of gardening and all of nature came from my grandfather who taught me, while even as a child, that all creation belongs to the Lord.

“Culinary Herbs” - 2:00 p.m.

By Arlene Hamilton

Arlene Hamilton is a Class of 2000 Texas Master Gardener and was named Outstanding Individual Master Gardener in Texas for 2003. Her area of interest has always been the use of herbs. Prior to retiring from her career as a church business administrator and moving to Texas she was active in the Webster Groves Herb Society in St. Louis, Missouri where she studied, grew and taught the use and delight of herbs throughout the area.

Arlene is presently a member of the Herb Society of America and the Greater Fort Worth Herb Society. She is past president of the North Texas Unit of HSA, past vice president of the GFWHS, past president of the Ellis County Master Gardeners and past president of the WGHS. She is a Texas Rainwater Harvesting Specialist and currently has over 1400 gallons of rainwater storage tanks for her gardens and wildlife habitat area.

Arlene is a much-requested speaker by garden clubs, civic groups and garden nurseries. She has taught classes and workshops throughout Texas and loves sharing her passion with others.





Keynote Speaker - Neil Sperry

3:00 p.m.

“Myths & Mystique of Gardening”

Neil Sperry has been the keynote speaker for our previous six Expos, and we are pleased to have him return this year. Neil presents a new and completely different approach

each year. Neil's name has been synonymous with Texas gardening since 1970.

Neil is a native Texan, having grown up in College Station. Both of his parents were on the faculty of Texas A&M, the son of a professor and head librarian. He attended Texas A&M, but his degrees are in Horticulture from Ohio State University. Neil and his wife Lynn have been happily married since 1967. They are charter members of Christ the Servant Lutheran Church in Allen. They are the proud parents of Brian, Todd and Erin and equally proud grandparents of Sam, Alex, Audrey, Lauren, Ella and Joseph.

He is the author of *“Neil Sperry's Complete Guide to Texas Gardening”*; the 4th best-selling gardening hardback in American history. Also, he is featured weekly in 15 Texas newspapers, including the Fort Worth Star Telegram and the San Antonio Express News. Neil owns and since 1987, has published *“Neil Sperry's GARDENS Magazine”* and since 1984 has published an annual Texas Gardening Calendar which features another of his loves: garden photography.



Hurricane Katrina in late August, 2005.

Since then, it has been introduced into commerce in the United States and has become a symbol among gardeners and rose lovers of a tenacious plant associated with a spirit of renewal and regrowth in the aftermath of a devastating blow of Nature against those living and gardening in the Gulf Coast area.

Peggy Martin has been a mainstay in the New Orleans Old Garden Rose Society for many years. She and her husband, MJ, lived in Plaquemines Parish a few miles across the Mississippi River from the city of New Orleans. Peggy's garden included a wonderful collection of old roses assembled with love and care over the years. According to Peggy "I was given cuttings of the thornless climber in 1989 by Ellen Dupriest who had gotten her rose cuttings from her mother-in-law, Faye Dupriest. Faye had gotten her cuttings from a relative's garden in New Orleans."

This rose is lushly beautiful with semi-thornless bright green foliage and is disease free. Clusters of roses congregate all along the canes. Once established this rose will bloom from September through November and possibly into December.

Neil broadcasts weekends over DFW powerhouse radio station WRAP NEWS/TALK 820 AM and 96.7 FM. That follows a very successful 30-year career at KRLD Dallas/Fort Worth. Additionally, he broadcasts to more than 50 stations statewide with his daily Plant Talk Texas and weekend Texas Lawn and Garden Hour.

Neil has been recognized by his peers and was selected as American Garden Communication of the Year by the American Association of Nurserymen. The Extension Service of Texas A&M identified him as Man of the Year in Texas Agriculture. The Garden Writer's Association of American has given his book, magazine, radio and television programs their top national awards. He was inducted into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame on October 18, 2003.

On a personal note, Neil and Lynn were named Volunteers of the Year for McKinney in 1997. Neil was named Citizen of the Year from McKinney in 2003; Lynn received the same award in 2006. Both serve on the advisory board of Serenity High, and much of Neil's fund-raising work, through his personal appearances and pen sales, is directed toward that school. Neil also chairs the board and is a founding member of the Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney.

Peggy Martin Rose

A beautiful but tough rose featured at the 2011
Lawn & Garden Expo Plant Sales
By Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

The 2011 Master Gardener Expo will be on Saturday, March 26 at the Waxahachie Civic Center. The Peggy Martin rose has been chosen as the focus plant for the Expo. The "Peggy Martin Rose" was one of only two plants surviving 20 feet of salt water over the garden of Mrs. Peggy Martin, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, after the destruction of

Peggy Martin Continued from page 5

During Hurricane Katrina Peggy lost her parents, her home, and the commercial fishing boat that her husband used to supplement their income. The house and garden were under about 20' of salt water for two weeks following the hurricane. When she was finally able to return to visit their property she was heartened to see the lush growth of her thornless climber, a testament to its toughness and status as a true survivor. This rose and one crinum were all that remained of the once beautiful garden.

Dr. Bill Welch, Professor and Texas AgriLife Extension Service Landscape Horticulturist at Texas A&M University was convinced that this rose deserved to be widely available and enjoyed by gardeners in other locations. Its disease resistant, thornless stems and colorful displays of bright pink flowers along with a graceful vining form make it a logical choice for creating beautiful garden pictures. His specimen is literally covered with clusters of dark pink flowers each spring from mid-March through May. It starts blooming again in late summer and repeats until a hard frost slows it down for the winter.



Children's Workshop 11th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo

By J.R. McMahan

Ellis County Master Gardener

The Ellis County Master Gardeners 11th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo offers something for everyone. Fantastic booths from local businesses and non-profits are all assembled together in the Waxahachie Civic Center on Saturday March 26, giving everyone the opportunity to see and talk to these great home and garden related folks. The Master Gardeners have one room available just for children! The Children's Workshop Room has Master Gardeners on hand to assist the elementary age group in learning about composting, soils, plants, insects and nature.

There will be a planting area where children can plant seeds in a pot to take home. They can make plant markers for their pots too. There will be a composting demonstration where the children can see composting worms in action. Several other hands-on craft activities are planned as well as some exciting nature exhibits to view. A special area in the Children's Workshop Room gives preschool age children a chance to do some handiwork of their own. The Children's Workshop Room will be open from 9am - 5pm in rooms C & D.

Save the date; Saturday, March 26, from 9-5 pm at the Lawn & Garden Expo in the Waxahachie Civic Center.

Pick up **free tickets** from one of our Expo Sponsors; for a list of our sponsors visit www.ecmga.com.



Expo Plant Sale --- Then and Now

By Melinda Kocian

Ellis County Master Gardener



The Ellis County Master Gardener's Annual Lawn & Garden Expo started in 2000. The event was held at the Ellis County Youth Expo Center on Highway 287. The picture on the left is the plant sale area in 2000. The picture on the right is the Plant Sale Area last year at the Waxahachie Civic Center. Boy! Have we come a long way!

An event you don't want to miss. Come early for the best selection to the **11th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo**, Saturday, March 26, from 9- 5pm at the Waxahachie Civic Center.

Get **free tickets** from an Expo Sponsor; locations listed on our website: www.ecmga.com

What's Happening in March

Starting **mid-March through July** - Garden Inspirations, 108 Ridge Crest Dr., Waxahachie, 214-497-3918 (Marilyn Simmons) - "**Vegetables in Partnership Local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)**". Baskets will always include fresh herbs and locally grown, freshly harvested, seasonal vegetables.

March 5 through April 10 - Dallas Blooms - Dallas Arboretum (www.dallasarboretum.org)

Saturday, March 5 - 10:00 a.m. - Cedar Ridge Preserve - Trout Lily Walk

Master Naturalist and long-time CRP volunteer Jim Varnum will conduct a short walk to observe trout lilies. The walk will last approximately 2 hours. Bring your camera. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support. Join Jim for a nature walk afterwards. Contact Jim Varnum jevvarnum@aol.com or 214-543-2055. **RSVP is not needed.**

Wednesday, March 9th - 9 – 11 AM, Conservation in Action! Cedar Ridge Preserve

Habitat Restoration and Trail Maintenance at Cedar Ridge Preserve happens the 3rd Saturday of every month throughout the year; rain or shine. Volunteers remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. Repairing trails reduces erosion trouble spots and removing non-native plants clears crowded trail edges. We'll provide snacks, water, pruning shears, shovels, and work gloves. All you need to bring is sun screen and bug repellent. Questions? Contact info_CRP@yahoo.com.

Friday, March 18 through Sunday March 20 - Tex-Scapes Greenery (Ennis) Spring Open House

Monday, March 28, 7 p.m. - Indian Trail Master Naturalists. Program: "Ellis County Wildflowers", presented by Carolyn Ross, Tina Regier and L.S. "Mox" Moxley. First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin, Waxahachie. One of a series of monthly programs offered on the 4th Monday of each month. Free and open to the public. Texas Master Naturalist chapters are sponsored by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

Saturday, March 26, 9 – 5 pm. - Ellis Co. Master Gardener's 11th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo, Waxahachie Civic Center.

Lighthouse for Learning

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

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

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

Thursdays, April 7-May 5 (4 classes) 6-8 pm. "Ag 101" - Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners - **Instructor Mark Arnold**, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, cost: \$22.00. This class will cover topics, such as soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management.

Monday, April 11, 6-7:30 - "Rainwater Harvesting", **Instructor Pam Daniel**, cost: \$12.00. Learn how to capture, divert, store and distribute rainwater for later use.

Monday, April 18, 5:30-8:00 - "Plant Propagation", **Instructor Walt Friis**, cost: \$12.00. Learn the basics of plant propagation, increasing and multiplying plants for the house, landscape and garden. Hands-on experience in the WISD HS Greenhouse.

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



Uninvited Houseguests

By *Maureen Nitkowski*
Ellis County Master Gardener



For all but the hottest, driest months in Ellis County, our homes seem to be invaded by millipedes. In the garden, millipedes are found beneath piles of damp leaves or wood where they are actively recycling organic matter back into the soil. What are they doing in our houses?



Millipedes are invertebrates, but they are not insects. Their name means "A thousand feet", which refers to the two pairs of legs present on each segment of their cylindrical bodies. They are brown, one to two inches long and can live for up to five years. It is their proclivity to migrate, particularly during cool, damp weather that brings millipedes indoors. Unfortunately for them, our homes are too dry and lack food sources, so they die within a day or two and remain as brittle spirals.

Whether indoors or out, if you handle or crush a millipede it will excrete a yellow liquid which can be a skin irritant to some and will also stain carpets or floors. Therefore, it is advisable to handle them with gloves or a paper towel and to wash hands thoroughly after contact.

The best defense against millipedes is to remove piles of leaves, wood or decaying vegetation in the vicinity of the house. Secondly, the homeowner should seal cracks in the foundation and gaps at the base of windows and doors to physically prevent entry. Pesticide application is a temporary control at best since millipedes can migrate fifty feet or more and will quickly die indoors on their own. In the garden they are beneficial recyclers and very rarely damage living plants.

Featured Vegetable of the Month

By *Rick Daniel*
Ellis County Master Gardener



Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

By Rick Daniel
Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

Hello, and welcome to the March edition of the Vegetable Gardeners Monthly. If you have questions that this article doesn't address, just give us a call at 972-825-5175 or contact us via the web at www.ecmga.com and ask for one of your Master Gardener Vegetable Gardening Specialist.

Something to consider when planning your garden layout are companion and adversarial plants. There are some plants that benefit each other and some that you never want to plant together. Nasturtiums and Marigolds are good companion plants for the garden. Here are some adversarial plants that should never be planted together. Asparagus and onion, bean and onion, beans and basil, broccoli and beans and carrots and cilantro.

For March, there is still time to plant cool season vegetables early in the month, such as Swiss chard, collards and turnips. Sow spinach seeds until the middle of the month and radishes all month.

Warm season vegetable can be seeded directly into the garden late month. Plant beans, cucumbers, cantaloupe, melons, sweet corn and squash. Tomatoes and peppers may be seeded, but both do best from transplants, late this month. Strawberries may be transplanted in sunny, well drained soil.

Tomatoes: Vegetable of the Month

Planting dates: For transplants, plant after all danger of frost in the spring (3/15 to 5/1). For fall (7/1 to 8/5). The sooner the better, as tomato plants stop setting fruit when nighttime temperatures reach 75° and daytime temperatures reach 92°, which is usually late May or early June in this area. If we have a late freeze, do not try to salvage cold damaged plants, as they seldom fully recover.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

Planting method: Plant with lots of compost and add a good slow release fertilizer. For organic gardening, add lava sand and green sand and lots of organic fertilizer. Dig out a large hole and fill with ½ compost and ½ removed soil. Sprinkle in fertilizer (slow release nitrogen) into hole and pre-water. For spring planting, do not plant too deep in heavy soils, as they remain cold longer and will often result in slow plant growth. Plant only 2-3 inches deep. Planting sideways is the best method in heavier clay soils. Set out transplants for a day or two to acclimate, and lay on their side so they will begin to grow upward before transplanting. Thoroughly water each plant after transplanting. Do not mulch in spring until 2-3 weeks after planting to allow soil to continue to warm. Mulch immediately for fall tomatoes. Wrap cages with row cover to protect from cool weather and wind during early growing season, but remove when ready for fruit set. Tomatoes are wind pollinated, not from bees.



Varieties: Many people now like to raise the Heirloom variety; just be aware they generally produce about 20% fewer tomatoes. Common to North Texas are Merced, President, Jackpot, Celebrity, Champion, Carnival, Better Boy, Brandywine, Roma and Sweet 1000 or Cherry Grande. Need to be VFN tolerant. Bush type, (determinate) are best with cages and vining type (indeterminate) are best with cages or a trellis.

Culture: If using cages, no need to prune or sucker your plants. Pinch off flowers the first few weeks, as this encourages additional flowering rather than fruit growth. Water evenly throughout growing season to prevent blossom-end rot and fruit cracking. Tomatoes don't like wet feet, so they do best when planted on raised beds. Best to use a drip system and water every 2-3 days.

Fertilizer: Heavy feeder. Use starter solution for transplants and side dress when first fruit sets and side dress again at first harvest. Repeat every 2-3 weeks. Use high nitrogen fertilizer (21-0-0) or use a handful of organic fertilizer per plant. Corn gluten meal or blood meal is a good nitrogen fertilizer. Can also use a weekly foliar spray of water soluble fertilizer or compost tea.

Harvest: Pick tomatoes after ripening on the vine and store in a cool dry place, not in the refrigerator. Picked tomatoes can be stored in the shade. Light is not necessary to ripen immature tomatoes. Tomatoes on the vine, ripen from the inside out, so when red on the outside, they are ready. Tomatoes picked green, ripen from the outside in, so they may still be green on the inside when red on the outside.

FRUIT OR VEGETABLE?

By Walt Friis, Ellis County Master Gardener

Is it a fruit or a vegetable? In botanical terms, a fruit is the reproductive part of the plant that develops when the flower is pollinated and produces seeds. These seeds will produce the next generation of plants. Many plants parts that we eat and commonly call vegetables are really fruit.

A true vegetable is a food product that comes from any part of the plant other than the flower, such as the roots (carrots and radishes), developing shoots (asparagus), stems (celery) or leaves (cabbage and lettuce).

If you can cut it open and see seeds inside, as with tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and eggplant, it is a fruit. If there are no seeds inside, it comes from a part of the plant other than the flower, and is a true vegetable. When you eat broccoli and cauliflower, you are actually eating unopened flower buds. So, what are broccoli and cauliflower: fruit, vegetable or something in between?

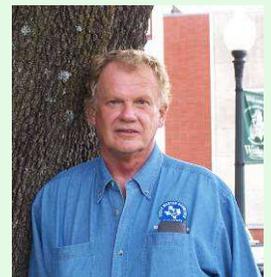
There are actually several different explanations used to separate fruits and vegetables. Fruit and vegetable growers distinguish the two by how the crop is grown. Vegetables are annual crops, which means the crop is planted, grown, and harvested all in one

year, and are planted in rows in the field. Fruits are perennial crops, which means that they grow and produce fruit over many years, rather than just one, and grow on bushes, vines, ground covers and trees.

Another explanation of the difference between fruits and vegetables is based on when the items is eaten. According to social custom, vegetables are food items eaten with a main meal, while fruits are sweet treats to be eaten for dessert. Therefore tomatoes, squash and eggplants are vegetables because they are eaten as part of the main meal.

The discussion of fruits versus vegetables went to the Supreme Court in 1893! The case concerned tomatoes. As vegetables, they were taxed at a lower rate than fruits, which were considered a luxury item. The Supreme Court apparently thought that social customs were more important than botanical distinctions, because they decided that tomatoes were vegetables. The line between fruits and vegetables has been fuzzy ever since.

The exact time and reason why many fruits began to be called vegetables is unclear; but one thing is for sure, there are a lot of fruits masquerading as vegetables on our dinner plates.





PUSHING THE SEASON

By Robert Shugart, Ellis County Master Gardener

Most vegetable gardeners have tired of reading the seed catalogues and most have the seed packets in hand well ahead of the planting season. Yes I do too.

I even planted my onions on New Year's Eve. As you know, the four local TV weather guys made sure I regretted my impatience.

I have read about something called row cover. This is a lightweight almost gauze like material that when used properly gives the plants under them a few degrees of protection from winter weather. I had 10 bunches of onions in the ground with extremely (for Ellis County) cold weather on the way. I decided to try the row cover. I had 60 feet of onions and the cloth was 50 feet long. My helping hand (my wife Betty) helped me spread the cloth on 50 feet of onions raising it up every 6 feet or so with Styrofoam buckets. We held it down with a bunch of "T-Posts" that I use to support my tomato cages.

To make a long story shorter, the onions under the cloth look as if they had no cold weather at all. The good news is that most of the onions, not under the cloth survived but were set back and had freeze damage. The cloth is a little pricey and I would not have bought it to save the price of the onions but the labor added to it and the fact that the cloth is reusable made it worth it this time. I am sure I will get a chance to use the cloth again when I rush the season.

I have to replant my spinach and kale as the seeds failed to germinate.

Claire and Kate, two of our granddaughters, helped me plant red seed potatoes last weekend. I haven't had much luck with potatoes in the past but the grandkids enjoy digging up the few we do make. Mike Kautzsch, one of my fellow gardeners, also has bad luck with potatoes. He thinks the Irish potato famine moved from Ireland to his garden.

Most of the local suppliers have a good supply of vegetable sets. Be selective on what you set out early. Easter is very late this year (April 24th) and Granny always says that we will have a pre-Easter cold spell.

You should be save planting leafy vegetable until you are comfortable that winter is over. The average frost free date is mid-March. But remember that is the average; I usually up-plant my tomatoes to gallon pots and move them outside only on warm days until I can put them in the garden.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Blue-Eyed Grass

Sisyrinchium spp.

Iris Family (Iridaceae)

Size: 6-20 inches

Blooms: March - July, Annual/Perennial

Range: 1-10 (Ellis County is range 4)

Blue-Eyed grass, of course, is not grass, nor are all species of *Sisyrinchium* blue, for their flowers range from white, yellow, mauve, and scarlet to purple-rose. The common name is not very appropriate. Members of this genus overlap in range and hybridize, making species difficult to distinguish, but all have dime-sized flowers. The six petals are usually tipped with a small point and nearly all have a yellow center, or "eye". Flowers emerge from paired bracts that form a spathe. Stems of most species are flat or winged, resembling the grass-like leaves. Alternate leaves are basal and sheath the stem. Blue-eyed grass sometimes blankets large areas, each clump forming a little blue nosegay.