



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VIII, Issue Three

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

March, 2014

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

The Ellis County Master Gardeners
12th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo
Saturday, March 29, 2014 ♦ 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Waxahachie Civic Center

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For expo details,
please visit www.ecmga.com

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EXTENSION



Listen to KBEC

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

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

Melinda Kocian

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Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo – March 29th

This year will mark the 14th anniversary for the Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo. On Saturday, March 29th, the Waxahachie Civic Center will come alive with hundreds of outdoor living exhibitors and thousands of attendees.

There are workshops for children and adults. The kids are guided by Master Gardeners to learn how to grow their own plants and make a variety of take-home projects. Adults can attend educational sessions on gardening techniques and topics, or ask the experts questions on specific gardening challenges. One of the most popular attractions is the Master Gardener plant sale. The variety of plants available for sale that are suited for the landscapes of North Central Texas gets bigger each year.

Exhibitors pack the civic center with landscape materials, plants, yard art, machinery and everything for outdoor living. Don't forget to register for many great door prizes donated by the exhibitors. You can also support the Ellis County 4-H students by having lunch and snacks at their concession stand.

The entire family can enjoy a day at the Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo. We encourage you to pick up your FREE tickets by visiting an Expo sponsor. See them listed on our website: www.ecmga.com.

Final Tips and Little Known Facts

The Expo is one of Ellis County's premier events with over 100 exhibitor booths and approximately 4,000 attendees. This show is unique within the metroplex because of its lawn and garden focus, educational opportunities, and the emphasis on fun for the whole family! A great way to promote new and existing businesses is to advertise in Ellis County through the Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo.

For information on being an exhibitor or sponsor, contact James Kocian at expo.ecmga@gmail.com.

It's March....What Needs To Be Done?

Planting

- ⊗ Annual flowers and herbs can be set out from containers in late March. For sunny areas: zinnias, firebush, pentas, petunias, moss rose, purslane, cleome, butterfly weed, and Dahlberg daisy. Cosmos and four o' clocks are self-seeding and will usually return each year. For shade: begonias, parilla, coleus, impatiens, and ferns.
- ⊗ Plant tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants from pots after March 15th. They should be hardened off (gradually exposed to outside temperatures) before putting them in the ground. Cover if a freeze or frost is predicted.
- ⊗ Plant seeds of warm-season vegetables such as beans, corn, squash, melons, and cucumbers in mid- to late-March. Wait until the soil warms in April to plant okra.
- ⊗ Vines (including hyacinth bean, Cyprus vine, black-eyed Susan vine, morning glories, and Malabar spinach) can be planted from seeds sown directly into well-prepared soil.
- ⊗ Plant perennial flowers and vines in amended, well-drained soil. See the planting guide, which shows the best native and adapted perennials for Ellis County at www.ecmga.com under the Resources tab.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- ⊗ 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.
- ⊗ Mow dead top growth (Bermuda grass only) low to the ground so the grass can spread faster and thicker, which helps to choke out weeds. Bag clippings and use in the compost pile or as mulch.
- ⊗ Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to pecans in March, and again in April and May.
- ⊗ Begin fertilizing roses with a balanced fertilizer.
- ⊗ All trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers can be fed with high-nitrogen fertilizer or compost.
- ⊗ A pre-emergent can be applied on lawns to help control spring and summer broadleaf and grassy weeds. A weed and feed fertilizer is not recommended because it is too early to fertilize lawns.

Garden Watch

- ⊗ 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.
- ⊗ Inspect the irrigation system to make sure it is operating properly. Look for leaks; replace or repair sprinkler heads and adjust spray patterns as needed to reduce run off.



Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Texas Paintbrush – Figwort Family (Scrophulariaceae)

Castilleja indivisa Engelm

Zone: 4-8
Size: 6-18 inches
Blooms: March–May, Annual



Nine species of paintbrush are found in Texas, but this is the only annual one. The conspicuous parts of the plant are the bracts, subtending and concealing the slender, one-inch, yellow-green flowers. Together they form showy three- to eight- inch terminal spikes. The bracts are brilliant red to re-orange, or orange.

Alternate leaves are one to four inches long, and both stems and leaves are hairy. Texas paintbrush is frequently planted along interstate highways. Mixed with bluebonnets and an occasional white prickly poppy, it makes one of the state's most outstanding spring wildflower displays

Heat Zones, Cold Zones...Huh?

*By Cheryl Sandoval
Ellis County Master Gardener Intern*



Have you noticed zone information on plant signs and wondered what it means? Here's a quick lesson...

A few reputable organizations publish maps to provide information about plants. The two most common are the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the American Horticultural Society (AHS). Simply stated, the maps are to help gardeners determine which plants are suitable for their location using average temperatures. Key word is average. We certainly experienced colder than average temperatures this winter!

The USDA map is the most widely used one, however it indicates the

cold temperature ranges for plants while the AHS map indicates the heat temperature ranges.

The USDA map is based on average annual minimum low temperatures and was most recently revised in 2012. There are 13 zones in the U.S. All of Ellis county is in Zone 8a, which indicates a low temperature range of 10-15 degrees. Sometimes plant signs may just indicate Zone 8.

The AHS map is based on the number of days a zone experiences temperatures over 86 degrees. The reason for this is when temperatures are higher than 86, plants may start experiencing heat damage. In the U.S., there are 12

zones. All of Ellis county is in Zone 9.

It would be great to know the zones from both maps, but at this point plant signs generally don't indicate both.

However, should you see one with two ranges, i.e., 3-8 and 9-1, you'll know it's a good candidate for our area as the first number indicates the USDA range and the second number, the AHS range.

For the USDA Cold Hardiness Zones visit: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/natives/hardiness.htm>

For the AHS Heat Zone Map, visit: <http://www.ahs.org/gardening-resources/gardening-maps/heat-zone-map#use>

2014 LAWN & GARDEN EXPO SPEAKERS

Jenny Wegley, Director of Research & Greenhouse, Dallas Arboretum

10:00 a.m. Trial By Flower

A lover of nature, Jenny grew up in Midlothian, a small town 25 miles south of Dallas. She was the kid playing in the flowerbed still in diapers - most likely eating dirt as well! She had her "first garden" at the ripe old age of 3, her first succulent trials at the age of 15, and built her first koi pond at 16. Jenny graduated with a B.S. in Horticulture from Stephen F. Austin State University and after a short stint in retail after graduation started at the Dallas Arboretum in 2009. She is now Director of Research and Greenhouse there, and still playing in the dirt!



Arlene Hamilton & Susan Clark

12:00 p.m. Food & Flavors of the Southwest

Arlene Hamilton and Susan Clark will be taking you on a journey of the herbs, vegetables, and edible plants that thrive from Texas to Central America. Explore a cornucopia of food flavors from chocolate mole to salsa verde. Recipes and samplings included.



Dr. Ridlon (Kip) Kiphart

2:00 p.m. Invite A Monarch To Lunch...Plant Milkweed

Dr. Ridlon (Kip) Kiphart of the *Monarch Biology, Ecology and Monarch Larval Monitoring Project Training* will be presenting information on Monarchs and developing your own Monarch Waystation.

Speakers will be presenting in the
Crape Myrtle Room of the Waxahachie Civic Center

2014 EXPO PLANT SALE

Roses ♦ Natives ♦ Adapted ♦ Perennials ♦ Annuals ♦ Herbs ♦ Vegetables ♦ Hanging Baskets

To prepare for the 2014 Expo, the Ellis County Master Gardeners started working in the greenhouse we share with the Waxahachie High School last September. Over the past several months, we propagated various cuttings, planted seeds for the tomatoes and peppers, transplanted plants into proper size containers, put together compatible plants in hanging baskets, and kept a watchful eye out for insects.

Each week, often multiple times a week, several master gardeners visit the greenhouse to prune, water, and feed the plants to ensure they are at their best by the end of March. It's a labor of love!

This year you'll find an expanded selection of roses to include Wild Ginger, Mrs. Dudley Cross, and Spice, just to name a few.

We're planting some tried and true varieties of tomatoes and peppers, and we also included some less common varieties. This year we're offering over ten varieties of tomatoes including Abe Lincoln, Tumbler, and Yellow Pear. Peppers include Bhut Jolokia, Big Bertha, Orange Habanero, Mucho Nacho, and Sheepnose Pimento.

In the herb category, you'll find lemon thyme, Greek oregano, spearmint, pineapple sage, and lemon grass.

The perennials this year include Dallas red lantana, various salvias, several plants to attract butterflies and others that are hardy in this area.

New this year is a limited number of hypertufa pots made by some of the Master Gardeners filled with sedums.

*** Shop Early for the Best Selection ***



2014 Expo Children's Workshop

By J.R. McMahan
Ellis County Master Gardener

The Children's Workshop Room has become a favorite area at the annual Ellis County Master Gardener Lawn & Garden Expo. Children and adults all enjoy the educational exhibits, hands-on activities, and lively atmosphere.

We will continue our popular herb area this year with herbs of the southwest featuring a salsa garden and southwestern herbs in the hanging shoe pockets.



If you missed our hanging shoe pockets herb display last year, you will want to check it out this time.

We will be showing the children how to make seed tape with small seeds. They will be able to make their own seed tape to take home and plant. We will also be demonstrating how to make your own seedling pots from newspaper that can be planted directly into the garden.

Master Gardener volunteers will be available to assist children with activities and answer parents questions about gardening with children. The

Master Naturalists will be joining us this year with a learning exhibit.

The Children's Workshop Room is always a buzz of activity and the honey bee demonstration hive will be on display again this year. Special guest appearances by Smokey Bear, following readings of the Smokey Bear story, are also scheduled throughout the day.

Plan to visit the Children's Workshop Room for a fun time and always a surprise or two!



Light House for Learning

(With the Ellis County Master Gardeners)

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

Register online at http://www.wisd.org/default.aspx?name=CO_LighthouseforLearning



Monday, March 3, 6:00-7:30 Backyard Chickens. Learn from an experienced chicken owner how to successfully raise a healthy flock. You will cover selecting breeds for egg layers or just some pretty "yard art" pets, how to protect them from predators, and what it takes to care for them. Discuss local regulations and HMO restrictions. **Instructor:** Carolyn Ross, Cost: \$12.00

Monday, March 24, 6:00-7:30 Mosquito Mitigation In Your Landscape. Learn about the "enemy" mosquitoes and how to thwart them. Do all mosquitoes carry diseases? Can my landscape and yard art harbor mosquitoes? What plants can I grow that may repel mosquitoes? Is there really such a thing as mosquito repellent from plant based constituents? Come on a mosquito safari and learn how you can have a more pleasant outdoor life with a minimum of mosquitoes. **Instructor:** Ginger Cole, Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 7, 6:00-7:30, All About Iris. All about Iris is an evening of visual presentations of the Iris Flower, grown locally in the yard of David & Pat Smith and a discussion of the Iris competition held in Florence Italy. In addition a Master Gardener volunteer will be on hand to instruct the planting and care of the Iris plant. **Instructor:** David Smith & Shirley Campbell, Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 14, 6:00-7:30 Seed Saving. Learn to harvest, clean and store seeds for successful germination. Learn how to save heirloom vegetables and perennial flowers. Determine what plants are best for seed saving and when to propagate from existing plants. **Instructor:** Monica Nyenhuis, Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 21, 6:00-7:30 Earth-Kind® Roses and Companion Plants. The Earth-Kind program provides plant choices for the gardener which have been field tested in Texas and proven to be less susceptible to pests, diseases and other problems. Recommended rose varieties come as dwarf, small and medium shrubs as well as climbers which will meet the needs of the home gardener. An assortment of companion plants for the roses which are equally durable will also be discussed. **Instructor:** Maureen Nitkowski, Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 28, 6:00-7:30 Container Gardening. Imagine walking out on your own deck or patio and harvesting vine-ripened tomatoes, fresh herbs, or crisp cucumbers. Growing vegetables in containers is not difficult. Let us show you how to bring the farmers market to your own back door. **Instructor:** Robin Smith, Cost: \$12.00

Tuesdays, April 8-29, four classes, 6:00- 8:00 Ag 101"—Beginning Farmer/Rancher. Join this experienced instructor as you cover topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management. This class will be held at the Ellis County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3 in Waxahachie. **Instructor:** Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Cost: \$22.00

ELLIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER SCHOLARSHIP 2014



In 2003, ECMGA decided to make scholarships available to local students. We wanted to provide opportunities for graduating high school seniors in Ellis County to study horticulture and/or related life sciences. Since then, we have given 24 scholarships in the amount of \$28,500.

One of the primary missions of the Ellis County Master Gardeners is to build partnerships with the Ellis County community to expand horticultural education and opportunities.

In keeping with this mission, the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association will again make scholarship funds available in 2014 to deserving high school seniors pursuing studies in horticulture-related fields.

To qualify, the applicant must be a graduating high school senior from an Ellis County High School, Venus ISD or Cedar Hill ISD or Ellis County Home Schooled Programs, have an elected academic major in a horticulture-related field that includes, but is not limited to: horticulture, agriculture, environmental science, forestry, botany or entomology, and be able to provide proof of acceptance at an accredited institution of higher learning.

The organization will offer two scholarships up to \$3,000 to qualifying students this year. Students applying for the Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarship are invited to visit www.ecmga.com to download the application found under the "What's Happening" tab. Submit it by mail or in person to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 701 South I-35, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX. 75165. If you need further information, please call (972) 825-5175. All applications must be received no later than April 1, 2014 by 4pm.

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



March Herb of the Month: Flavors of the Southwest

Did you know chocolate is considered an herb? Hot chocolate was once considered a medicinal drink that aided digestion and helped against “fits of anger”. Surely we all feel better and more content after a steaming cup of hot chocolate.

Another flavorful herb to come to us out of Mexico and Central America is cilantro, used in salsas, picos, and many fresh salads. For a special side dish, try seasoning small new potatoes, cooked and quartered, then dressed with butter, olive oil, garlic, some lime juice, and a bunch of fresh chopped cilantro.

Chile peppers (*Capsicum*) are a major crop of Mexico and New Mexico where the hot, arid climate produces a large variety of mild to extremely hot peppers. Chiles can be eaten green, or ripened to red, dried, or roasted for a smokier flavor. Many of these peppers will grow well in our area of North Texas.

Epazote is native to Southern and Central Mexico and has a pungent taste and aroma. It is reported that cooking field beans with this potent herb will reduce the gassy side effects of eating beans. A few chopped leaves add a spicy flavor to squash, corn and tomato dishes.

Mexican Mint Marigold and Mexican Oregano are other popular herbs that

came to our gardens and tables from Mexico. Both can be found as plants in garden nurseries that specialize in herbs or dried in the Mexican food section of our local grocery stores.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is at home in the gardens of the Southwest, including North Texas. It prefers our alkaline soil, but needs to be protected from overwatering in clay. Placing several limestone rocks around the base may help keep the roots dry. Sage has pebbly, silver leaves, but also comes in other colors such as purple, golden, and tricolor. A favorite of mine is Pineapple Sage with a fruity flavor and glorious red tubular flowers loved by the hummingbirds.

Field beans, such as pinto, black-eyed, red, and black could have been domesticated in Central and South America. Fossilized seed material has been found in Central America and Peru, which dates to 7,000 years ago. By the time European explorers arrived in the New World, field beans were an

important food staple. Today field beans are the most widely cultivated species of *Phaseolus*. In terms of tons of crop produced per year, they are the second most important legume in the world (soybeans are first). They are

now widely grown in Southwest America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

Corn and tomatillos are New World plants also, and came to us from the Aztecs and Mayas.

Tomatoes are another New World treasure found by Spanish explorers and transported throughout the world. Every gardener dreams of picking sun-ripened tomatoes from their garden. In Texas, that can be a hit-or-miss venture! But there are definitely some techniques, soil amendments, and plant varieties, including heirlooms that can bolster your chances for success.

Susan Clark and I will be presenting “Foods and Flavors of the Southwest” at the ECMG Lawn and Garden Expo on Saturday, March 29 at noon. Come and learn more about growing and using tomatoes and peppers along with tasty herbs and other vegetables to create mouthwatering Mexican salsas and chutneys as well as Southwest flavored herbal treats. Samples and recipes will be served!



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MARCH

Saturday, March 1, 9am–12pm, Earthtones Greenery Spring Auction. No minimums or reserves. Tons of trees, shrubs, iron work, pottery, fountains, décor, stone, chimineas and much, much more! Over 300 lots available. BBQ lunch provided at 11 a.m. 810 E. Main St., Midlothian. For details, call (972) 723-0702.

Saturday, March 1, and Sunday, March 2, Weston Gardens Container Workshop (Saturday only) and "Harmony with Nature" Lecture. Container workshop is \$29. Call to register. Harmony lecture is free both Saturday and Sunday. 8101 Anglin Drive, Fort Worth. Call (817) 572-0549 or visit www.westongardens.com

Saturday, March 1, 9am–4pm, Fort Worth Botanical Gardens Butterflies in the Garden Opening Day and Orchid Society Sale. Orchid sale continues on Sunday, March 2, 10am–4pm. Located at 3220 Botanic Garden Blvd, Fort Worth. For details and admission prices, visit <http://fwbg.org/> or call (817) 392-5510.

Saturday, March 1, 10am–2pm, BRIT First Saturday. Enjoy tours, children's activities, vendors and booths, and a special program. March's program is **Bees! Bats! Butterflies! See it all at BRIT and learn why we are a "Pollen Nation!"** Free butterfly posters to the first 300 visitors! Activities will include: family scavenger hunt, plant ID station, bee workshop, bat workshop and more! Bella's Story Time at 10:30–Isabel's House of Butterflies. For more info, visit <http://www.brit.org/events/more-children-families>.

Saturday, March 15, 10am, John Bunker Sand's Pond Trail Walk. Join a trail walk on the newly opened Bunker's Pond Trail. Learn about the natural and cultural history of the area as you walk a 1.8 mile loop trail. Free with \$5 admission. 655 Martin Lane, Seagoville. For info, visit <http://www.wetlandcenter.com/newhome.html> or call (972) 474-9100.

Saturday, March 15, 9am–12pm, Cedar Ridge Preserve—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. Location: 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas. Contact: info_CRP@yahoo.com.

Monday, March 24, 7pm, ITMN present "Native Orchids of Ellis & Navaroo Counties" by Gary Spicer. Gary Spicer is an environmental professional with over 30 years of experience in the areas of water quality, wildlife management, fisheries, wetlands, and the like. A charter member of the Rio Brazos Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist, Gary's numerous interests include native plants, photography, and natural history. The program is free and follows the 6 p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. Meeting Location—First United Methodist Church, Family Life Center 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie, TX. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu

Saturday, March 29, 8am–12pm, Water Conserving Plant Sale presented by Texas SmartScape™ and Home Depot. This event will be held at Home Depot, 7100 North Freeway, Fort Worth. For details, a plant list, and other events, visit <http://www.txsmartscape.com/events/plantsale.asp>

Now through Sunday, April 6, Dallas Blooms at the Dallas Arboretum. Now in its 30th year, this annual festival offers one of the most spectacular floral displays in the world featuring over 500,000 blooming spring bulbs. View the outstanding collection of tulips, daffodils, pansies, violas, poppies and thousands of other annuals and perennials. Highlights of the festival include the blooming of over 100 Cherry Blossom trees and the mass flowering of 6,000 azaleas. For more info about events and visiting the arboretum, go to: www.dallasarboretum.org/



Spring Gardening Classes

There are many opportunities in our area for learning more about gardening and the environment. Ellis County Master Gardeners' Lighthouse for Learning spring classes are listed on page six. The following organizations also offer classes. Please visit their websites for more information.

The Dallas Arboretum. Classes include: Landscape Design, Tomatoes, TX Tough Plants, Xeriscapes, and many more. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/education/adult-programs/gardening-and-design> for details and to register. Fees vary.

Ask an Expert and Dig in Deep Events include Composting, Benefits of Mulching, Planting and Transplanting, Sowing Seeds, Bulbs and more. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/visit/seasonal-festivals-events/dallas-blooms>

Garden Inspirations. Classes in March include Perennials, Aquaponics, Organic Gardening, Canning, Tomatoes, and more. For complete details and to register for classes, visit www.gardeninspirations-tx.com.

Saturday March 15, 9am–4:30pm, Level 1, Introduction to Native Landscapes presented by the Native Plant Society of TX. You will learn the value of including and preserving native plants in landscapes, understand the differences between sustainable and conventional development, learn your Texas vegetation region and soil type, and learn 50 native Texas plants recommended for your landscape. Fort Worth Botanic Garden, Fort Worth.

Spring Garden Fever!

By Robin Smith
Ellis County Master Gardener



Spring is right around the corner and who among us can't WAIT to get our hands in the soil? At this time of year, I find it hard to contain my excitement and I tend to get ahead of myself a bit. If you're like me, a little restraint is in order. Here's some tips that will allow you to have fun, but still get great results in your garden:

- ❖ Don't be in a hurry to put out young pepper or tomato plants. Wait until close to the end of the month to be sure all chance of frost is gone. And be prepared to cover them if temperatures dip low one night.
- ❖ Prune evergreens, summer flowering trees and shrubs early in the month. For trees and shrubs that bloom in the spring, wait until they finish blooming. Prune fruit trees before bud break.
- ❖ Go ahead and order your caladium bulbs so you get the best selection, but wait to plant them until May. Store them in a cool, dry spot until then.
- ❖ Cut back groundcover early in the month so it looks nice and tidy when it sends out new shoots later.
- ❖ Plant trees, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, perennials, herbs, cool season veggies, and annuals like geraniums, snapdragons, petunias, and alyssum. Watch these tender new babies carefully for dryness as temps begin to rise because it will take a while for their root systems to get established.

(Continued on page 10)

What's Happening (Continued from page 8)

Texas Discovery Gardens

3601 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Dallas

TexasDiscoveryGardens.org

Saturday, March 1, 10am–12pm, Save the Rain (Rainwater Collection Class). Patrick Dickinson, Program Coordinator-Urban Water, will share basic water harvesting strategies, how to calculate the amount of water that you can capture and then help you construct your own rain barrel. Each student will construct and go home with a rain barrel that is ready to start capturing water on their property. \$75, \$60 for TDG Members. Register in advance.

Saturday, March 1, 12:30pm–3pm, Paint your Rain Barrel. Join Janet Reynolds as she provides fun environment for us to make our rain barrels pretty, now that they are functional. We will share a box lunch as we create our own masterpieces. \$40, 32 for TDG Members. Purchase both Rain Barrel classes for a discounted \$100, \$80 for TDG Members.

March 8, 2014 at 11am, Garden Explorers Walk: Greenhouse Tour. Enjoy a behind-the-scenes tour of our greenhouse on this family friendly walk! It ends in time for the Butterfly Release talk at noon in our conservatory. Included with admission.

March 22, 2014 from 2 pm–4 pm, Herb Infused Oils and Vinegars. Enjoy a tour of our Herb Garden to show how to correctly clip herbs. We then take these fresh herbs inside and infuse olive oils and vinegars. Leave with your own infused oil and an herb plant! \$25; \$20 for TDG Members. Register in advance.

March 29, 2014 from 10 am–12pm, Native Plants for Dallas Landscapes. New to Dallas? Or new to Big D gardening? Discover Metroplex-worthy plants for your garden and learn about our special ecosystem requirements. Take home one of Director of Horticulture Roger Sanderson's favorite native plants. \$25; \$20 for TDG Members. Register in advance.

Dogwood Canyon

1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill

<http://tx.audubon.org/dogwood-canyon-audubon-center>

Sunday, March 9, 9am–11am, Landscaping for Birds. With the planting season just around the corner, join Janet Smith, MG and NTMN, to learn how to create a bird friendly landscape using native plants. Free for members; \$25 for non-members. To register, email dcac@audubon.org or call (469) 526-1980.

Saturday, March 22, 9am–12pm, Dogwood Canyon—Fourth Saturday Workday. Located at 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. For more info, contact Julie Collins at jcollins@audubon.org.

In the Vegetable Garden

By Ginger Cole
Ellis County Master Gardener



Arugula, it is an incredibly easy salad green to grow in a container, flowerbed, or garden. You may know it by one of its various names such as garden rocket, rucola, roquette, and colewort. All the names probably stem from the Latin base *eruca*.



Arugula belongs to the genus *Eruca* and the family *Brassicaceae*. It is closely related to radishes, kale, and cauliflower. Arugula is grown both on a large scale for commercial consumption, but also exists as a wild species throughout the world.

Plant it now before it gets too hot. It likes full sun, but if planted in partial shade, will have a longer growing season. Plant the tiny seeds in prepared soil by spacing them about two inches apart and then dust them with a light layer of soil. Gently press the soil down on the seeds and water being careful not to disturb or wash the seeds away. Keep the soil evenly moist until the arugula germinates in about 7 to 14 days. Once the seedlings are three to four inches in height, the leaves may be harvested or you may harvest the entire plant. Depending on the weather conditions, arugula should be ready to harvest in 45 days.

Arugula contains high levels of folic acid and antioxidants like vitamin C, K, and A, which makes arugula integral in the fight against free radicals. It is packed with carotenoids, as well as many other minerals like potassium, manganese, iron, and calcium, all of which are beneficial and necessary elements in a person's diet.

In addition to just adding a few leaves to your own salad recipes, try mixing fresh arugula leaves with onion, a squeeze of lemon juice, dash of olive oil, and shaved Parmesan cheese. This can be served on top of warm pasta with a few toasted pine nuts.



Daylight Savings-Spring Forward: March 9th
Average Last Frost Date: March 15th

Spring Garden Fever (Continued from page 9)

- ❖ Avoid buying bare root trees and shrubs as it's too late in the season. Opt instead for container-grown or balled and burlapped specimens.
- ❖ After camellias and azaleas finish blooming, fertilize with three pounds of azalea-camellia fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed area.
- ❖ Add mulch to beds as needed to get ready for the heat, moderating soil temps and retaining moisture. Three to four inch of mulch is optimum.
- ❖ Fertilize roses every four to six weeks from now until September.
- ❖ It's the perfect time to plant begonias.
- ❖ Fertilize your lawn with a good lawn fertilizer according to package directions.



Landscape Gardening

From: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

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

How Can You Protect Tomatoes When Planting Early in the Spring?

Dr. Joe Masabni, Assistant Professor & Veg. Specialist, TX A&M AgriLife Ext.

How soon can I plant my tomatoes? That's a question on my mind every year. With the winter season towards its end and warm days more and more common, every gardener starts itching to plant his vegetable garden, primarily the king of them all, the mighty tomato.

There's a reason every gardener wishes to plant tomatoes as early as possible, and not just for the need to garden. And the reason is that in most areas of Texas, tomato plants stop setting fruit by early July so we need to maximize our harvest season by first of July. So, the earlier in, the earlier we can harvest before July 1st.

Tomato plants stop setting fruit by July 1st because night temperatures by then are in the mid-70s with about saturated relative humidity. Both those conditions cause the pollen grains of the tomato flower to burst, thus no pollination occurs. So how soon can we plant tomatoes outside and what can we do to win the game?

In Texas counties east of I-35, the average date of the last spring frost is March 1st in the north between Dallas and Houston, February 14th from Houston to Corpus Christi, January 30th from Corpus Christi to McAllen, and no frost normally occurring in the Harlingen area. Of course, these are average frost free dates and growers are reminded to check their local county historical weather data.

With these dates in mind, our goal is to plant as close to the last spring

frost date as possible. If we take the March 1st date for the College Station area, then we have four months of time before last tomato harvest. But the four months are harvest months, we must account for plant growth and development before the first harvest, which is usually in late May or early June. Basically, we have one to one and a half months of tomato harvest before July 1st.

So, how can we extend the tomato harvest? We can if we consider cultural methods to plant earlier than the last spring frost date.

Two tools available to the homeowner are hotkaps and pre-punched plastic tunnels. Hotkaps are waxed paper that goes over the small transplant with its edge buried in the soil



Hotkap protectors

to hold it down.

The Hotkap (www.hotkaps.com) is advertised as extending the growing season by two to four weeks. It is a single use item and the hotkaps are sold in quantities.

I have used them both and was pleased with their performance in terms of improved growth with Hotkaps rather than without them.

The pre-punched plastic and the wire hoops used to create a mini-tunnel and an air pocket about one

to one and a half feet over the tomato plants resulted in bigger plants compared to the Hotkaps. The plastic is available online from many sources and are usually called 'low



Plastic tunnel

tunnels', or 'hoop supported row covers'.

The plastic can be used for multiple seasons if care is given in removal and storage.

Finally, the easiest cultural tool in my opinion is to plant a large plant early in the season. Larger plants can tolerate cold weather and can grow much more rapidly than smaller plants when the weather warms up. The photos on page 12 show the before and after images of a large tomato plant buried horizontally except for about six inches of the tip above ground. The leaves will compost, the stems will develop many roots, and the tomato will grow into a large plant in no time.

So, if you get the desire to plant tomatoes outside in mid-February instead of March 1st, make sure you get the biggest tomato plant, bury most of it horizontally, and cover it with a Hotkap or with a small plastic tunnel. With proper fertilization and a little luck, you will enjoy a bountiful harvest.

(Continued on page 12)



Landscape Gardening (Continued from page 11)

March To-Do List

Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Hort. TX A&M AgriLife Extension

- ☺ Often, tomato and pepper plants started outdoors from seed will grow so quickly they will catch up with commercial plants in size within a few weeks. For many gardeners, this is the only way to obtain rare or heirloom varieties. But because this has been a winter with erratic weather patterns, it's best to keep an eye on young tomato transplants so that they may be covered if the threat of a late frost occurs.
- ☺ Don't be in a hurry to set out young pepper plants. Wait until the temperatures seem to be settled.
- ☺ Pruning of evergreens and summer flowering trees and shrubs should be completed in early March. Prune spring flowering trees and shrubs as soon as they finish blooming.
- ☺ Start hanging baskets of petunias, ferns and others for another dimension in landscape color. One attractive begonia plant can yield a number of others through careful rooting of stem cuttings.
- ☺ Plant dahlia tubers in fertile, well-drained soil.
- ☺ In North Texas, there is still time to plant seeds of your favorite

annuals in flats to be transplanted out-of-doors when the danger of frost is past.

- ☺ Select and order caladium tubers as well as coleus plants for late April and early May planting. Do not plant caladiums until soil temperature reaches 70°F.
- ☺ As camellia and azalea plants finish blooming, fertilize them with three pounds of azalea-camellia fer-



Large plant, before

tilizer per 100 square feet of bed area. Check mulch on azalea and camellia beds and add where needed.

- ☺ Fertilize roses every four to six weeks from now until September.
- ☺ Beware of close-out sales on bare-root trees and shrubs. The



Large plant, after

chance of survival is rather low on bare-root plants this late in the season. Your best bet at this time of year is to depend on container-grown or balled-and-burlapped plants for landscape use.

- ☺ Plant Blue Plumbago (*Plumbago capensis*) now for season long, low maintenance color. It is usually cold hardy to Zone 8 and sheltered places elsewhere. Although tolerant of sunny conditions, blue plumbago prefers a little protection from the hot afternoon sun. It is quite drought tolerant and blooms from spring till frost.

- ☺ Now is a time to thin larkspur, zinnia, cockscomb, and cosmos seedlings. Plants will bloom much better if thinned to about four inches apart. Transplant or share the extras with gardening friends.



Blue Plumbago

TOMATOES—King of the Texas Garden

By Susan Gilliland
Ellis County Master Gardener



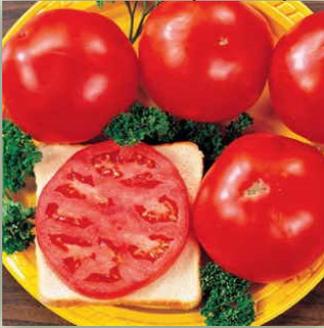
All vegetable gardeners love to produce tasty tomatoes. The ripening process of turning green to a beautiful red gives us all a great deal of satisfaction. Tomatoes can be eaten fresh or cooked in many ways and they are a good source of vitamin A, provide healthy amounts of vitamin C and K, and are a good source of an antioxidant compound called lycopene.

Tomatoes grow well in most Texas areas and they need at least six hours of sunlight each day. In preparing the soil, remember that tomatoes like organic matter (compost, leaves or rotted hay) mixed into the top for to six inches of soil. Now is a great time to begin bed preparation, but don't be tempted to plant them just yet – wait until mid-to-late March.

If you plan to grow tomatoes for your own consumption, you probably only need a few plants so it's best to buy healthy plants rather than grow them from seed. Then, the big decision is what variety? There are hundreds of great tomatoes.

Your final selection should depend on the intended use—good canning and sauce tomatoes are not the same as a perfect sandwich or salad tomato.

I'm assuming that the readers of this article are looking for tasty, reliable, good producing tomatoes that will be consumed fresh. Mid-sized tomatoes like the Celebrity have been a favorite of Ellis County Master Gardeners and it is the primary variety offered at the annual Expo. Celebrity tomatoes are a 72-day, eight ounce, good producer, disease and drought resistant, very tasty, and don't split when the weather gets hot. Texas summers really are too hot to pro-



duce all summer, but if you can keep your plants alive, they will often produce again in the fall. Some gardeners would rather put in new plants for the fall garden. Unless you have a good way to protect your plants from a freeze, do not plant them until after March 15, our last average frost. Try to plant them in the evening or on a cloudy day to minimize drying and wilting.

The next question is—to stake, cage or let them sprawl? That depends on your space and energy level. Staking takes constant care (tying and pruning) and, once you fall behind, it's difficult to make things right again.

Caging requires building or buying sturdy cages and placing them in the garden in such a way that the wind won't blow them over. They save you space; you don't have to prune and good strong cages are very effective. Letting them sprawl only works if you have lots of space and you are able to keep the tomatoes off the ground using mulch (straw).

For those living in smaller spaces, there are special tomato varieties that are intended for pots and they produce great tomatoes. A five gallon pot is the minimum you should consider. Take special care to water often (probably daily) and fertilize weekly.

Tomatoes need food and water. Any fertilizer with three

equal numbers such as 10-10-10 will work. Tomato production and plant health will be increased greatly with a weekly application of water soluble fertilizer sprayed on the tomato foliage. Second choice would be to carefully put granular fertilizer around the base of the plant. Plants should be watered slowly and deeply so that a deep root system is established. During dry periods, do not let the plants wilt as that will hinder yield and fruit quality.

You live in Texas and you will have insects and possibly disease. Inspect your tomatoes daily and you will detect insects and diseases early—before your plants get damaged. These topics are far too detailed to address in this article. If you are

having issues, contact your local Extension Agent or Master Gardener Association for assistance.

Special Note:

One of the most common ques-

tions about tomato plants is what the difference is between determinate and indeterminate varieties. Once you know the difference, it's easy to make informed decisions about which tomatoes will work best in your garden. **Determinate tomatoes** bear their crop all at once, while **indeterminate tomatoes** bear fruit over the course of a season. Indeterminate varieties tend to grow longer vines and will require more support in terms of staking or caging over the course of a season. Determinate varieties often (but not always) tend to be more compact and man-



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