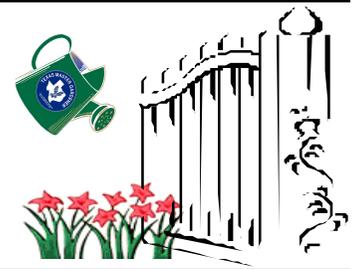




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume II, Issue 4

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

May, 2008

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, edi tor



ELLIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS STRIKE AGAIN!

By Nancy Fenton, 2008 President, Ellis Co. Master Gardeners

Ellis County Master Gardeners attended the state conference in Conroe, Texas this weekend, April 24 - 26 and walked away with another 7 awards for outstanding efforts across the board. Their entries in Mass Media-Educational Projects and Graphic Publications for the public all took 1st place across the state in the medium-sized division of the county associations.

The Graphic presentation was developed to provide information ranging from water conservation and rain barrels to extensive collection and use of rainwater in the home, informs the audience of basic water resources regarding Texas' future water resources. The other 1st place was Mass Media.

There were four 2nd place awards:

Expo 2007's Children's Garden in the Educational Programs section. This program was presented for the first time in 2007 and coordinated by Mimi DeLoach, providing a child's eye view of insects and plant growth stages to over 140 individuals.

Individual Master Gardener of the Year- Pam Daniel: With a certification in Rainwater Harvesting, Pam our 2007 Association president, was instrumental in helping to develop the first place winning Graphic Presentation, 'Introduction to Rainwater Harvesting'.

Newsletter - E-Gardening Newsletter: While steadily increasing in numbers, this web-published newsletter, Melinda Kocian-Editor, boasts a current distribution list of more than 250 individuals—which doesn't include those who read the newsletter at their convenience on the Ellis County Master Gardener website, www.ecmga.com.

Community Project - Greenhouse: Established in cooperation with Waxahachie ISD, this project provides an additional learning environment for high school-aged Horticultural students, while at the same time providing the Ellis County Master Gardener Association with a facility adequate for growing a number of the plants that will be available at next year's Lawn and Garden Expo.

(Continued on page 11)



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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What's Happening in May?

Saturday, May 3, 9:00-12 noon - Texas Discovery Gardens-Butterfly Gardening Workshop. Put on by Dale Clark, president of the Dallas County Lepidopterists' Society. \$45, \$35 for members. Contact Sarah Gardner, 214-428-7476, Ext. 23 or contact@texasdiscoverygardens.org.

Petal Pushers, Cedar Hill:

Saturday, May 3:

10:30, "Texas Natives: Good, Better and Best", Rosa Finsley

1:00, "Gardens of Scotland", Rosa Finsley

Sunday, May 4:

1:30, "Container Gardening", Vicki Thaxton

Cedar Hill State Park - for further details, call 972-291-3900, ext. 232

May 3 - "Mammals-Our Fuzzy, Furry Friends

May 3, 10, 31- "Blooms of Spring Wildflower Walk"

May 17- "7th Annual Youth Carp Fishing Event

May 23- "Bats-Friend or Foe?"

May 24- "Reptiles-Our Scaly Skinned Friends

May 24, 31- "Penn Farm Tour"

Saturday, May 3, 8:30 am - Cedar Ridge Preserve - "Take a Hike". Painted Bunting Walk with Dr. Marcy Brown Marsden. Leads a walk where the beautiful Painted Buntings are most likely to be found. You will probably also see Indigo Buntings, Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, White-eyed Vireos and possibly Ruby-throated and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. For information RSVP to Dr. Brown Marsden at biomarcy@winwaed.com.

Saturday, May 3, 1:00 - Cedar Ridge Preserve - "Take a Hike". Spring Wildflower Walk with Master Naturalist Jim Varnum. It is helpful but not necessary to RSVP to Jim at jevvarnum@aol.com or 972-243-4098

Sunday, May 4 - Arlington Two-fer, 10:00 and/or 1:00 pm. - Feel free to attend either one or both. Both walks led by Master Naturalists Jan Miller (CTMN) and Jim Varnum (NTC).

10:00-Southwest Nature Preserve. Location: east side of Bowman Springs Rd., Arlington.

Map: www.ci.arlington.tx.us/parking/planning_issues.html. Click on Southwest Nature Preserve.

1:00-New York Avenue Blackland Prairie. Location: east side of New York Ave. about 1 mile south of IH-20.

Contact Jim Varnum at jevvarnum@aol.com.

Sunday, May 4, 10:00 a.m. - Southwest Nature Preserve. This preserve has just been "discovered" by plant collector Jeff Quayle, who has found several interesting plants including Glen Rose yucca, listed in the new Rare Plants of Texas, and farkle-berry. The preserve has prairie, forest, ponds and wetlands. Soil is sandy and rocky. **Location:** east side of Bowman Springs Rd., just south of IH-20. For a photo map, visit www.ci.arlington.tx.us/park/planning_issues.html. Click on Southwest Nature Preserve.

Mother's Day, Weston Gardens, Sunday, May 11, 11-5:00 p.m.,

Live harp music from 1:30-4:00, hot/cold special teas will be served. Free 4" plant for all mothers visiting the gardens. 8101 Anglin Drive, Ft. Worth (south of I-20), 817-572-0549. For more information, visit their website: www.westongardens.com.

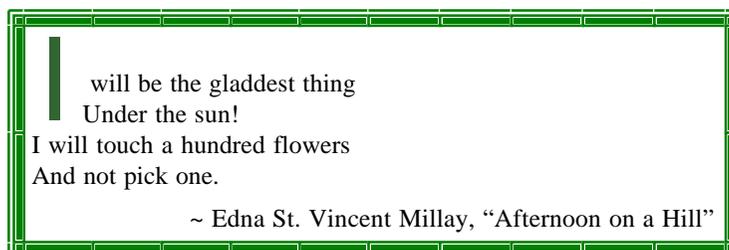
Tuesday, May 13, 7:00 p.m. - The Greenery, Waxahachie. "Organic by Design" presented by Lucy Harrell. Lucy is a 30-year veteran of organic design. She has a vast knowledge of plants for the metroplex area. All gardener can have success if following her advise.

Saturday, May 17, Texas Discovery Gardens, Fair Park in Dallas, "Caterpillar Crawl" - Bring your magnifying glass and hunt for caterpillars! Admission is \$3 for adults, \$2 for seniors and \$1.50 for children; free for children under 3 and Texas Discovery Gardens members. For more information, please call 214-428-7476 or visit the website at www.texasdiscoverygardens.org.

Sat. and Sun., June 2-3rd: Weston Gardens, "Celebrate Summer:

1:30 - "Great Summer Iced Teas", Saturday and Sunday

3:00 - "Longest Lasting, Toughest Perennials"



It's May - What Needs to be Done?



Featured Plant for May

Butterfly Weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*

An annual or tender perennial milkweed plant that attracts the Monarch butterfly, food for birds and hummingbirds. Plant from small pot or seed. Easy to grow in any soil.

Exposure:	Sun
Size:	Ht. 2'-3'
Spread:	2'
Spacing:	2'

Planting and Sowing

- Plant summer- and fall-flowering perennials from nursery stock.
- Sow seeds for okra and southern peas and plant sweet potatoes early this month.
- There's still time to plant summer annuals from 4-inch and 6-inch nursery stock. For sun, include purple fountain grass, alternanthera, firebush, and crotons. For shade, don't overlook elephant ears, ferns, nicotiana, and other tropical foliage plants.
- Transplant your houseplants into next larger sized pots.

Pruning and Fertilizing

- Early this month, manually thin peaches and plums, and perhaps pears, so that remaining fruit are 5 to 6 inches apart on the branch.
- Fertilize landscape plants and lawns with high-nitrogen fertilizer. Use same fertilizer on annual and perennial flowers, and vegetables if needed.
- Pinch growing tips of blackberries, coleus, fall asters, and Mexican bush sage, among others, to encourage fuller, less vertical growth.
- Remove flower buds on caladiums, coleus, lamb's ear, and dusty miller to maintain their vegetative growth.

- Fertilize pecans with all-nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of 1 pound per inch of trunk diameter. Apply around the tree's drip line.

Garden Watch

- Trim unsightly new webworm colonies in pecans and other trees with a pole pruner.
- Use systemic insecticide to control lace bugs on pyracantha, Boston ivy, oaks, and boxwood, among others. Plant leaves will appear colorless and will have black specks on their undersides.
- Control early blight on tomatoes with a listed fungicide. Look for large yellow blotches that start on lower leaves and move up the plant. Fresh, thick mulch around your plants will help prevent the problem.

The chance of groundwater contamination from excessive nitrates washing through the soil is lessened when a slow-release, sulfur-coated, or plastic-covered urea is used. However, the more slow-release fertilizer present, the more expensive the product, but safeguarding the environment is certainly worth the cost difference!

Did You Know?

The world's oldest recorded tree is a 9,550 year old spruce in the Dalarna province of Sweden. The spruce tree has shown to be a tenacious survivor that has endured by growing between erect trees and smaller bushes in pace with the dramatic climate changes over time...

In the Swedish mountains, from Lapland in the North to Dalarna in the South, scientists have found a cluster of around 20 spruces that are 8,000 years old. Although summers have been colder over the past 10,000 years, these trees have survived harsh weather conditions due to their ability to push out another trunk as the other one died. The average increase in temperature during the summers over the past hundred years has risen one degree in the mountain areas.

Facts from ScienceDaily (Apr. 16, 2008). For more about this interesting discovery, visit <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/04/080416104320.htm>.

Date: April 16, 2008
To: County News Media
From: Glen C. Moore, Extension Agent-IPM
972-825-5186



For Immediate Release:

Bee Swarms Common This Spring

The Extension office has received numerous bee calls over the last several weeks. The following article by Dr. Mike Merchant, Extension Urban Entomologist, describes swarms and nesting in and around homes.

DALLAS, TX. If recent calls from concerned homeowners are any indication, wild bees seem to be doing fine in Texas this year. This despite last summer's worries about declines in honey bee colonies among commercial beekeepers.

Bee swarms occur most commonly during the early spring when new queens decide to spread their wings and take part of the mother colony with her to a new nest site. Bee swarms, therefore, are simply families of homeless bees in search of new places to settle.

The problem with swarming bees doesn't have to do with danger from their stings. This is because bees in swarms are much less likely to exhibit aggressive behavior than bees which have a nest to defend. The problem with swarms is that there are not a lot of acceptable nesting sites in urban neighborhoods--at least not acceptable from our human perspective. If a nest settles in a backyard tree it could pose a hazard to gardeners or children. And, if a colony discovers a way into your house, you could get stung in the pocketbook.

If they can find a way in, bees willingly take up residence in the walls or ceiling of homes and other human structures. If this happens, the nest will have to be removed, preferably by an experienced professional, and often at significant cost. If nests are not removed, after time the accumulation of wax, honey and dead bees may produce objectionable odors and attract pests like mice, ants, cockroaches, and other scavenger insects.

Although some prefer to leave their wild bee swarms alone, the safest course in urban areas is to hire a beekeeper to remove the swarm, or exterminate it before it can discover a way into your home. Swarm extermination can be done by a professional, or can be done with an inexpensive sprayer and soapy water.

For more information about bees in and around homes, please contact the Texas AgriLife Extension Service – Ellis/Navarro Counties.

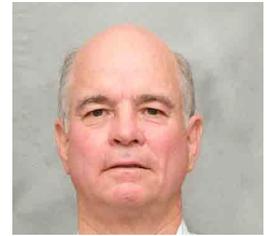
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Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperation.

Look at us, said the violets blooming at her feet, all last winter we slept in the seeming death but at the right time God awakened us, and here we are to comfort you.

~Edward Payson Rod

Date: April 21, 2008
 To: County News Media
 From: Glen C. Moore, Extension Agent-IPM
 972-825-5186



For Immediate Release:

Protect Yourself from Mosquitoes and WNV

Glen Moore
 Extension Agent-IPM

Recent rainfall and the return of warmer weather provide favorable conditions for mosquitoes. Any sources of standing water should be drained, if possible to minimize mosquito breeding sites. Often sites of standing water that are overlooked include old tires, boat covers, flower pots, and clogged rain gutters, etc. Pet watering bowls should be changed frequently. Larger bodies of water which can not be drained should be treated with a larvicide such as Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis* – israeliensis), which is found in Vectobac Briquets, Bactimos Briquets, Summit B.t.i Briquets or Mosquito Dunk. These small donut shaped briquets kill mosquito larvae and provides up to 30 days control.

Although West Nile Viral cases are often more abundant in late summer and early fall, the diverse Texas climate means that the disease can be transmitted year round. Prevention and the use of an effective repellent can greatly minimize the threat of the disease.

If possible limit outdoor activity at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. Dress appropriately when venturing

outside; long sleeve shirt and long pants. For extra protection clothing can be treated with a repellent. Use an insect repellent that contains DEET as the active ingredient. For additional information, please contact the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

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There are bunnies in my garden! But that's OK; I like these bunnies. They have little white faces surrounded by pink flower petals. They are one of the new Texas Superstars; their name is "bunny bloom larkspur". I have the pine variety but there is also a blue bunny bloom.

Bunny bloom larkspur (*Consolida ambigua*) is a beautiful re-seeding annual with the face of a bunny in every flower. Tightly compact blossoms are arranged on spikes.

For several days after blooms open the bunny head can be detected. If the presence of a cute bunny head in a flower is not enough to excite you, guess when larkspur bloom in this area? Around Easter! What fun for the children!

Larkspur is exceedingly easy to grow and returns each year on its own. Planted in full sun or partial shade, it reaches a 1-foot spread and blooms each spring.

The foliage is a lacy evergreen. Seeds are sown in the fall. Heavy mulches cannot be used in areas where reseeded annuals are desired as the seed must make contact with the soil.

Transplants may be found in the nurseries in January and Febru-

Bunnies in the Garden

By Shirley Campbell, Ellis Co. Master Gardener



ary. This is an ideal time to plant transplants to add greenery to an otherwise dreary winter landscape.

Once you plant bunny blooms and if you let the bunnies drop their faces and mature seed pods, you will be blessed with an abundance of blooms for years—this plant multiplies just as the rabbits it displays with such beauty.

Although larkspurs grow during winter, it takes the warmth of spring to coax them into rapid growth. They reach their full height shortly after Easter in north central Texas. The plants are spectacular, easily grown and make wonderful fresh, as well as dried, cut flowers. Thinning the seedlings to 10 inches apart will result in a spectacular display.

Plant them in well-drained soil with a moderate amount of watering as they tend to rot at the base in soils that retain excessive moisture. Give them plenty of room where they can spread freely in years to come.

A word of caution—do not eat the flower, leaves or seed; they are highly toxic!

Spring and Summer Turf grass Care

Submitted by Jim Tachias, Ellis County Master Gardener



A beautiful lawn is the most important feature for a well landscaped home. A homeowner's investment in a lawn and other landscaping is as good as any home improvement in increasing the value of a residence. A green well-groomed lawn is the first thing a visitor notices as they look at your home.

SOIL PREPARATION – Remove all debris such as rocks, stones, stumps, and any construction debris. Till the soil and mix in some organic matter to the top 3 to 5 inches of the soil. Rake smooth and grade properly to provide surface drainage. Seed or lay sod or sprigs.

WARM-SEASON TURFGRASSES – Common Bermuda grass and St. Augustine grass are the most recommended grasses in our area. Bermuda grass is the most widely used. It has good heat, wear, and drought tolerance. Bermuda grass is not shade tolerant and needs a lot of sunlight. It should be planted when soil temperatures reach at least 62°. It can be planted from seed or sod.

St. Augustine grass has a broader leaf and has an outstanding shade tolerance, but will not flourish in deep shade locations. It is established by sod or sprigs and should be planted from the middle of March through September

Raleigh or Delmar varieties of St. Augustine grasses are preferred because of improved cold tolerance and resistant to SAD virus. Both are susceptible to brown patch and chinch bugs.

WATERING – Water newly planted areas regularly to keep the surface moist. As the seed or sod begins to grow, reduce the frequency and increase the amount of water to develop a deep root system. For established lawns, soak to a depth of 4 to 6

inches. For soils high in clay an inch of water or ½ inch of water for sandy soil will usually wet the soil to the desired depth. Early morning is the best time to water. Water only when needed which is just before the grass begins to wilt. The grass will take on a full purplish cast and the leaf blades will begin to roll or fold. You will also be able to see tracks when someone walks across the lawn as evidence that the grass needs watering.

FERTILIZING – Get a soil test available from Texas A&M. Contact your county agent at 973-823-5175 for a packet on how to do the test. Fertilize new lawns once a month lightly, following test recommendations for the first several months or use a 4-1-2 or a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer with slow release nitrogen. For established lawns you should put down a fertilizer in the spring, early summer, and early fall. Again, use the soil test recommendation or a 4-1-2 or 3-1-2 ratio with slow release nitrogen. Always follow instructions on the bag for recommended amount per 1000 feet.

MOWING – Do not mow new grass until it is 2 to 3 inches high. Grass should be mowed frequently to prevent removing more than 40 to 50 percent of the growth at any one mowing. Mowing heights of established lawns are as follows;

Common Bermuda	1 to 1.5 inches
Hybrid Bermuda	0.5 to 0.75 inches
St. Augustine grass in sun	2.0 to 2.5 inches
St. Augustine in shade	2.5 to 3.5 inches

Lawns can be scalped in the spring to control winter weeds, help control thatch, and promote earlier spring green up. Scalping can be done right before spring green up but after the danger of a late freeze.

For additional information on turf grass contact the Ellis County Office of the Texas Cooperative Extension Service at 972-825-5175.

When we load up in the car and head out to buy plants, how many of us actually have a landscape plan in mind before we purchase? I, for one, LOVE to buy plants and am always “finding a place” to put whatever I acquired that day. Don't get me wrong, I do have an idea of what I would ideally like my yard to look like, but the temptation to try this new variety or ... oooh, look at the bloom on this one ... generally wins me over and I impulse buy. Although plantings are a great way to help our environment, planting the WRONG plants is detrimental to the environment too. Some species simply require too much water, other species are invasive and soon overgrow the space we originally plant to contain them, still others can poison native species of insects, birds and other small mammals and reptiles. In honor of Earth Day, I thought I would use today's column to introduce you to a few organizations that focus on ecology issues we as Texans, along with Americans all over this beautiful country, are hearing more and more about. These concepts are becoming more familiar to us as “green” is increasing in popularity, and legislation is being influenced by the ideas these organizations are touting.

- North American Native Plant Society. www.nanps.org A nonprofit association dedicated to the study, conservation, cultivation and restoration of native plants.
- Plant Native www.plantnative.org This organization is dedicated to moving native plants and nature-scaping into mainstream landscaping practices.



(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

- Soil and Water Conservation Society. www.swcs.org An organization focused on fostering the science and art of sustainable soil, water and related natural resource management.
- Ecological Restoration <http://ecologicalrestoration.info> This quarterly print and online publication from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum provides a forum for people interested in all aspects of ecological restoration.
- Society for Ecological Restoration International www.ser.org Nonprofit consortium of scientists, planners, administrators, ecological consultants, landscape architects, engineers, and others with the mission of promoting ecological restoration as a means of sustaining the diversity of life and reestablishing an ecologically healthy relationship between nature and culture.
- America Rainwater Catchment Systems Association www.arcsa-usa.org ARCSA was founded to promote rainwater catchment systems in the United States. Its website provides regional resources, publications, suppliers and membership information.
- Texas Water Development Board Website www.twdb.state.tx.us This website provides data from the State of Texas regarding water resources and services, such as groundwater mapping and water availability modeling. The site also provides published brochures regarding indoor and outdoor water efficiency.
- Water Wiser: The Water Efficiency Clearhouse www.awwa.org/waterwiser/ This clearinghouse provides articles, reference materials and papers on all forms of water efficiency.
- Ellis County Master Gardeners www.ECMGA.com This website is produced by the local Master Gardener organization, which is part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Office (fka County Extension Office). This site contains numerous links for Rainwater Harvesting and Drip Irrigation Resources, local Native Plant dealers, and lists of the recommended plants, trees and shrubs for Ellis County to name only a few.

Check out a few of these sites and see how you can make your mark on the planet a positive one! Planning our plantings around water needs, size requirements and hardscape features is a necessity in Texas. Planning our lifestyles to accommodate and appreciate local ecology benefits us individually as much as it does the environment we share.

Jamey Guarascio-Cosper is an Ellis County Master Gardener

Water, Air and Light

by Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener



We all know what it takes for our plants (and us) to grow: water, air and light. The light is an easy one, the sun shines or it doesn't, but water and air are a bit harder to figure if our plants are getting the amount they need. They absorb most of their food in the "water" form through the roots, but did you know they get lots of their air that way too?

Our hard, tight clay soils make the plants growing in them struggle to push their roots out to get enough surface area to absorb the air and water they need, hence the need for organic matter in our soils to provide the "breathing room" and water retention for when they are thirsty again. We can dig, dig, dig the organic stuff into the flowerbeds, but what about our lawns and trees?

This is where aeration comes in. Simply speaking it is making holes in the lawn especially in compacted areas (those that see a lot of wear from foot traffic or haven't see a spade or fork in your or my lifetime). My neighbors laugh when they see me out in my front yard with my spading fork poking holes in my lawn, but I know of only one other way of getting the air and water down through the heavy clay to the root level about 8 inches down. I employ the 10 to 15 minutes a day routine. This is leaving my fork on the front porch and going out when the weather is decent and I have ten minutes or so between chores or waiting for someone. It does add up and for me getting started is half the battle. It won't get done in a day, but over several weeks all my lawn and big trees will have a breath of fresh air and a little more water down there where they can get to it.

About the other method short of plowing up the yard. There is a great machine called an aerator. They probably weigh about 200 pounds and put ½ inch wide holes about 3" deep into your yard every 6 inches. We've used them in Wyoming when we were young and foolish. Foolish because we didn't realize they came with an automatic vibrator! The machine hits so hard that I couldn't hold it and so my poor husband had my share of shakes and his for days afterwards! Unless you can find a friend that likes to jiggle a lot or hire it done, opt for the fork! You might want to mark your sprinkler heads also since it's hard to see when your body is shaking every which way.

You can aerate any time of the year, but I prefer spring since the ground is usually a bit softer. I just push my fork down as far as I can and wiggle it a bit before I pull it out to go on to the next place about 8-12 inches away. It enlarges the hole a bit so water, fertilizer, and air can get down more easily. After this dry winter it is going to be even more important for our big trees so think about giving your trees some air!

Gardening Tips

By Jamey Guarascio-Cosper, Ellis County Master Gardener



Want to spend more time enjoying your garden rather than working in it? There are several easy ways to cut back on the time you spend in your yard.

- Install a brick mowing strip between your flower or vegetable beds and the lawn. This level mowing surface is a great way to keep you from having to use a trimmer around the edges. A brick mowing strip is not only a great way to keep from having to mow around the edges of your yard, but it also adds character and definition to your yard and garden.
- Keep a small tarp inside your gardening bucket along with your most used tools. When it is time to pull weeds, spread your tarp out and make sure to throw the weeds on the tarp. Drag the tarp place to place as you weed and then simply pick it up and dump all the weeds at one time rather than making numerous trips.
- Weed often. Removing those weeds while they are young is the easiest way to control weeds and most importantly, it keeps weeds from establishing good root systems and from flowering.
- Punch small holes in leaky hoses and wrap them around trees and bushes to serve as a drip-irrigation system. Not only does it save water loss through evaporation, but it also keeps your plants deeply watered at the roots without causing fungus to grow on the vegetation.
- Newspaper is a gardener's best friend, especially when it is thickly laid around plants to control weeds.
- Have you tried lasagna gardening? Check back next month for an article explaining lasagna gardening.
- Keep a terra cotta pot of sand near your garden shed. Dig hand shovels in the sand before putting away each day to keep rust at bay and edges sharp.
- Like bird watching? Leave mop strings for the birds. Buy a white cotton string mop head. Use scissors to clip the ends of the mop loops so that they hang in single strands (rather than loops). Nail the mop head to a fence or porch post letting the strings hang down freely. **BE SURE** to pick a location where you can watch and wait for the birds to arrive.

Time is a rare commodity these days. Make sure that you take the time to enjoy the fruits of your labor. Remember that gardening is supposed to be fun and rewarding- creative ingenuity goes a long way.

Texas Rainwater Catchment Association

By Rick Daniel, 2008 Master Gardener Intern

I am pleased to announce that we have officially formed a state organization called the Texas Rainwater Catchment Association (TRCA) to educate and support people in the State of Texas interested in Rainwater Collection. This organization is a state chapter of the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association (ARCSA). Texas is just the second state in the USA to form a state chapter, after Hawaii.

The idea for this chapter was initiated during a meeting in Georgetown on December 1st. My wife, Pam Daniel, and I attended this meeting and took the training course and passed the test to become "American Rainwater Catchment Systems Accredited Professionals". This was only the second accreditation course offered in the USA. The board of directors was elected at this meeting and we have been working diligently to get our by-laws written and then approved by our current membership. The by-laws were approved and the board voted to accept them as written at a board meeting in Johnson City on April 17th. Here are the elected board members;

Billy Kniffen-President
 John Kight-Vice President
 Joe Wheeler-Treasurer
 Tamarah Wall-Secretary
 Rick Daniel-Membership/Publications

The mission of TRCA is as follows: The mission of the Texas Rainwater Catchment Association is to provide Texas citizens with credible information and resources on rainwater collection, to promote the advancement of rainwater conservation and to work with state, county and other local government units in promoting rainwater catchment.

We will have our initial web page launched by May 1st, and will be adding to it and expanding the capabilities on a continual basis. The web page is www.TEXRCA.org. If you are interested in joining, the annual dues are \$20 for an individual and \$75 for a business. You will be able to download a membership form from the web page. We hope that all of you who currently collect and use rainwater and those of you who are interested join and support our organization.



Featured Flowers of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Variegated Society Garlic 'Silver Lace'

Tulbaghia violacea

As an ornamental, society garlic has a lot going for it. This tender somewhat tender perennial boasts a long season of star-shaped mauve flowers above evergreen foliage, which may be solid green or - in the case of 'Silver Lace' - variegated with a cream stripe.

But society garlic isn't really garlic, even though it gives off a distinctive garlicky scent. In fact, it's more closely related to Narcissus than to the Alliums.

Nor does it prevent garlic breath, as once believed. Its leaves can be used as a garnish or in soups, although many modern references caution against eating large quantities of the plant as it may cause stomach upset.

Plant society garlic in full sun. It is suitable for containers or massed in a border. Where it is hardy, the plants will form large clumps and spread by underground rhizomes.



Type of plant:	Bulbs
Bloom color:	Violet/Lavender
Bloom time of year:	Mid Summer
Sun requirements:	Full Sun
Cold hardiness:	Zone 7a to Zone 10b
Height:	2-18 in., 18-24 in.
Spacing:	3-6 in.

Gold Dust Plant 'Variegate'

Aucuba japonica

Aucuba japonica is from Japan, no big surprise there. What is surprising is the ease with which this plant can be grown, as long as it has plenty of shade and well-drained, fertile soil. It was introduced to England in the late 1700s and migrated to the U.S. in the late 1800s.

A member of the dogwood family, this evergreen shrub can reach six feet tall, but can be kept in check with spring pruning or shearing. The gold-splotched leaves are large - two inches wide and six or seven inches in length.

If pollinated, the female plants produce red berries in the fall or early winter, a nice bonus to a nice landscape plant for southern gardens.

Type of plant:	Shrubs
Bloom color:	Inconspicuous/none
Bloom time of year:	Late Winter/Early Spring
Sun requirements:	Partial to Full Shade
Cold hardiness:	Zone 6a to Zone 10b
Height:	8-10 ft.
Spacing:	4-6 ft.





Christmas Cactus *Schlumbergera x buckleyi*

Second only to the Poinsettias, Christmas Cactus is definitely a favorite holiday plant, and has been used as such since the 1800s when early breeders crossed *Schlumbergera truncata* with *Schlumbergera russelliana* to create the modern hybrids available today.

Originally hailing from the rainforests of Brazil, *Schlumbergera* truly is a member of the cactus family, even though it lacks the spines that characterize many of its relatives. It is an epiphytic plant and in its native habitat, it is found growing on tree branches.

As a house plant, it will do best with regular waterings and well-draining soil. It is a short-day plant, so blooming is triggered by at least 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness and cool temperatures (in the 50s.) Left to their own schedule, most northern-grown *Schlumbergera* will flower in late fall to early winter.

Type of plant:	Tropicals and Tender Perennials
Bloom color:	Pink, Red, Coral/Apricot, White/Near White
Bloom time of year:	Late Fall/Early Winter, Mid Winter
Sun requirements:	Sun to Partial Shade
Cold hardiness:	Zone 9a to Zone 11
Height:	18-24 in.
Spacing:	24-36 in.



Spring is upon us! Thus, it is time to get out in your yard and go to work. Before you take the time (and spend the money) to put up that wood panel fence that restricts your view of your little part of the world, consider a living fence: a natural wall for privacy made from live shrubs, trees, or bamboo. Not only does a living fence “blend” more naturally, it appeals to wildlife AND absorbs CO2!

Benefits? Yeah, we’ve got ‘em!

Aside from the obvious environmental benefits, a nice thing about a living fence is that your fence will be unique! Deciduous plantings change colors throughout the year and some bushes will bloom and/or berry. A living fence might need a fresh layer of compost annually to keep it looking good, but you won’t have to put chemical sealers on it to keep it healthy.

Bushes are also far more durable in strong storms than panels of wood. Anyone that’s experienced “straight line winds” can attest to the fact that wood panel fences often end up leaning after a Texas storm even with a concrete base.

If that’s not enough to convince you, the wildlife will love you. Due to the volume of construction in Midlothian, trees and bushes have been replaced with grass and concrete – birds, bugs, butterflies and bees are feeling the pressure. A living fence will give them somewhere to raise their young, dine, and hide from predators.

And as I alluded to earlier, for those of you concerned about the ozone layer, keep in mind that dead-wood fences don’t absorb pollutants the way live ones do.

An obvious drawback to the living fence concept is that it may take a year or two for you to get the kind of privacy that you are looking for from your fence.

The only other warning I would offer is to be aware of the type of bamboo you use. Some species of bamboo are invasive and will soon turn your beautiful bamboo fence into a bamboo jungle! Ask a trusted nursery or call the Ellis County Extension Office, 972-825-5175 or www.ecgma.com for a list of bamboo suitable for North Texas.

Happy planting!

Jamey Guarascio-Cosper
Ellis County Master Gardener



It's May - What Else Needs to be Done?

By Carolyn Foster, Ellis Co. Master Gardener



Through the ages gardeners have noticed that certain plants that are often found together in nature seem to grow better together. This is called “the symbiotic” relationships of certain plants. This is true of plants in our gardens also. Try it; I think you will be pleasantly surprised.

<u>Sweet Basil</u>	next to tomato plants gave them larger, healthier and better tasting tomatoes.
<u>Marigold</u>	is said to keep the soil free of nematodes and other insects such as tomato worms and beetles.
<u>Beets</u>	improve the production of onions.
<u>Borage</u>	attracts bees, deters tomato worms and is good with tomatoes.
<u>Cabbage</u>	helps peas, lettuce and onions.
<u>Celery</u>	is good with leeks, tomatoes, bush beans and cabbage.
<u>Chives</u>	planted around the base of fruit trees is said to discourage insects from climbing the trunks.
<u>Cucumbers</u>	do well with beans, peas, corn, radishes and sunflowers.
<u>Dill</u>	is great with cabbage but not with carrots.
<u>Fennel</u>	is disliked by most plants.
<u>Garlic</u>	improves the growth and health of roses and raspberries, also deters Japanese beetles.
<u>Henbit</u>	(the weed) is said to be a general insect repellent.
<u>Mint</u>	improves the health and flavor of cabbage and tomatoes while deterring white cabbage moth.
<u>Nasturtium</u>	planted under fruit trees deters aphids and squash bugs.
<u>Onions</u>	are good with beans and protects lettuce against slugs.
<u>Painted Daisy</u>	keeps aphids off itself and neighboring plants.
<u>Parsley</u>	likes to be near asparagus.
<u>Peas</u>	add nitrogen to the soil.
<u>Radishes</u>	serve as a general aid in repelling insects.
<u>Sage</u>	contributes to the growth of rosemary, carrots, cabbage, peas and beans.
<u>Spearmint</u>	scattered on pantry shelves and in closets will prevent infestation and repel clothes moths.
<u>Thyme</u>	deters cabbage worms.
<u>Tomatoes</u>	aid onion, chives, parsley, marigold, Lima beans and asparagus.

Let us know if any of these work in you garden patch. Or if you know of others share them with us. We'll be waiting to hear from you. Until next time, keep Gardening Smart.

If you like exploring the field of gardening, trees, insects, soil, the Ellis County Master Gardeners (ECMG) is the organization for you. Call 972 825-5175 or visit our website @ www.ECMGA.com. We'd like for you to join us at the next meeting. We meet 2nd Tuesday of each month.

(Continued from page 1)

Third Place - Publication - Junior Master Gardener News: This newsletter, circulated to students in the Waxahachie school district, is based on a compilation of weekly columns published in the Waxahachie Daily Light newspaper. In addition, articles written by Master Gardeners Mimi DeLoach and Walt Friis covering various topics, stimulate interest in the Junior Master Gardener program and encourage the use of gardening as a learning environment.

Ten Master Gardeners from Ellis County attended the conference, complete with 8 hours of instructional classes and 6 hours spent viewing diverse gardens. Present were: Pam and Rick Daniel, Melinda and James Kocian, Lou VanZandt, Maureen Nitkowski, Lu Millican, Micki Roark, Shirley Campbell and Nancy Fenton.

Congratulations to all members involved in the winning programs, and to those who assisted with the award submissions: Mindy Phillips - coordinator, Melinda Kocian, Arlene Hamilton and Pam Daniel.