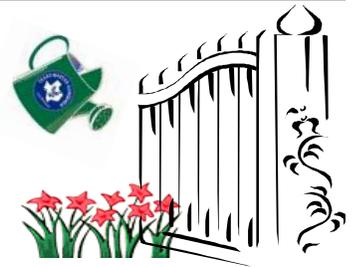




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume V, Issue 4

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

May, 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

2011 Master Gardener State Conference Glen Rose, Texas

Fourteen of us just returned from a 3-day trip to Glen Rose, Texas, to attend the Annual Texas Master Gardener Conference. There are four categories within each organization size: small (1-50), medium (51-100), medium-large (101-199) and large (200 +). The member size of our Ellis County Organization puts us in the medium-large category. Within the competition of awards, we are proud to say we returned with two awards within our size category.



1st place - Website Education Award
Ellis County E-Garden newsletter, submitted by Sue Pille



2nd place - Individual Master Gardener of the Year-
James Kocian (someone very near and dear to my heart!)

Congratulations Sue & James: You Make us Proud!



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

What's Happening in May

Fri-Sat., May 6-7 - Tex-Scapes Greenery's Mother's Day Sale.

Sunday, May 15 - Larken Farms Orchard Opening Day.

Saturday, May 28th - EarthTones Greenery Memorial Day Sale

Saturday, May 28 - Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market begins!



Cedar Ridge Preserve

Saturday, May 7 - 8-10am, Painted Bunting Walk with Marcy Brown Marsden. A walk on the western side of the preserve for painted and indigo buntings and other spring birds. Meet in parking lot and caravan to the site. Info @ Audubon Dallas website: www.audubondallas.org.

Saturday, May 21, 9-12pm - Conservation in Action Workday. For info call Jim Var-num 214-543-2055 or jevarnum@aol.com.

Dallas Arboretum:

Friday, May 6, 4:00pm - 5:30pm - "Lone Star Greats: Tough Texas Plants" presented by Jimmy Turner. Reservations can be made online at 214-515-6540 or www.dallasarboretum.org.

Friday, May 6 from 5:30pm - 8:00pm - **Members Only Plant Sale Preview** - there will be a preview sale for Arboretum Members and those attending the "Lone Star Greats: Tough Texas Plants," program on Friday, May 6th from 5:30 to 8:00pm.

Sat. May 7th from 8am-5pm - Plant Sale Open to Public, free of charge in the Arboretum parking lot behind Rosine Hall from 8:00 am to 5:00pm.

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It's May....What Needs to be Done?



Asparagus

Photo by Pam Daniel

Asparagus and Artichoke Salad

By Betty and Jon Reuscher

3 (8-oz.) cans artichoke hearts, quartered
 3 lbs. asparagus, cooked until barely tender,
 cut into 2-inch pieces
 1 (8-oz.) can hearts of palm, cut in slices,
 optional
 ½ onion, minced
 1/3 c. olive oil
 1/3 c. salad oil
 1 ½ tsp. salt
 1 T. Dijon mustard
 seasoned pepper, to taste, optional

Combine all ingredients and marinate overnight.

Serves 12.

Planting

- This is planning time for sweet potatoes.
- Now is the time to plant other hot-weather, summer-blooming plants: Mexican firebush, blue daze, succulents, purple fountain grass, purslane, moss rose and angel's trumpet, which needs some afternoon shade. For shade, you can use Texas gold columbine, elephant ears and caladiums. Wait until June to plant periwinkle (vinca).
- Spring-blooming bulbs can be dug, divided and replanted. Make sure the tops have dried before moving. The foliage feeds the bulbs for next year's blooms.

Pruning and Fertilizing

- Manually thin peaches, apples, pears and plums about 6 to 8 inches apart to produce larger fruit.
- Fertilize tomatoes and most other vegetables every other week for vigorous and productive plants.
- Mow lawn grass the proper height every five days to keep it dense and healthy. Mow Bermuda grass 1½ inches and St. Augustine at 2½ inches. Keep the mower blade sharp for a good clean cut to prevent browning at the grass tips.
- Dead-head roses and other reblooming plants. Feed fruit trees, perennials, annuals, ground covers and vines with a lawn fertilizer.
- Pinch back aster, chrysanthemum, Cooper Canyon daisy and Mexican mint marigold to encourage a compact plant and more blooms in the fall.

Garden Watch

- Look for insects and diseases on tomatoes and other crops. Early detection is imperative. Keep the soil adequately moist to prevent blossom-end rot on tomatoes. If it is detected, spray for early blight with a labeled insecticide.
- Horn worms on tomatoes are common and can devastate a crop. They can usually be removed by hand or controlled by Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). Use it with care on any plant. It can kill beneficial caterpillars that are butterfly larva.
- Squash vine borers and squash bugs tend to be a problem. Destroy the eggs of squash bugs found on the underside of the leaves by hand or a stream of water. Most vegetable pests often can be controlled by using pesticides labeled for use on vegetables.

Odds and Ends

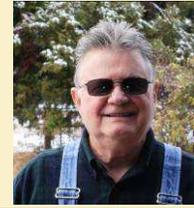
- Maintain a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch around all plants and bed areas.
- Keep it several inches away from trunks or stems of plants to prevent excess moisture and the entry of disease and insects.
- Shredded hardwood is one of the best types of mulch, but any type that decomposes to provide nutrients is fine. Grass clippings provide nitrogen for the soil so leave them on the lawn or put them in the compost pile.

Tips for Asparagus

A member of the lily family; asparagus comes from the Greek word *asparagos*, which first appeared in English print around 1000 A.D. Asparagus is a nutrient-dense food that is high in folic acid and is a good source of potassium, fiber, vitamins B6, A and C and thiamin. Asparagus has no fat, contains no cholesterol and is low in sodium.

Vegetable Gardening

*By Robert Shugart
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Experience the Taste of Sweet Corn Direct From the Garden

As every 5th grader knows, the Indians introduced corn to the Pilgrims in the 1500's. The plant was probably a mix between field corn and maize. It was very starchy and lacking in flavor. Our field corn was produced primarily for livestock. Today's corn is used for cornstarch, corn syrup, and alcohol products (for fuel, not to drink). I digress. Sweet corn was probably brought up to us from South America.



I hope you have had the experience of eating a good sweet corn fresh from the garden. Good quality sweet corn can't be purchased from the "big box" grocers because it begins to lose its flavor within hours of harvest.



I hope you decide to try sweet corn in your garden. Good quality soil is always important, but corn has shallow roots so deep tillage is not as important as for other crops. Corn is a heavy feeder and about 1 lb. of complete fertilizer per 100 sq. feet should be turned into the soil before it is planted.

One of the most important procedures is to plant corn in blocks rather than in one or two long rows. Corn is wind-pollinated so good density increases the potential for good pollination and full ears.

Begin planting as soon as the soil temperature reaches 50°F degrees with rows about 30 inches apart. Early farmers used the old saying, "Plant your corn when the leaves on your oak tree are the size of a mouse's ear". (obviously not a Live Oak Tree).

If the soil is dry, water 2 to 3 days before planting. Plant 3 to 4 seeds per foot and thin to one per foot. This is important to improve yield and quality.

When plants are about 12 inches tall "dirt" them. That means to pull dirt up on to the roots to help them stand up to the wind better. Follow up with side dressing with a nitrogen (21/0/0) fertilizer at the rate of about 1/3 of a cup per 35 foot of row. Work it into the soil about 6 inches on both sides of the row and water it in. Do this again when they are about half grown.

Make sure your plants don't suffer from moisture stress; leaves will sometimes curl in the early part of the day if they need water. Mulching will help with moisture and weed control.

Corn ear worms are a problem and will infect most ears unless controlled. The ears can be treated with Sevin dust on the silks as soon as the silks appear and every week till harvest. Some folks prefer a few drops of a "food quality" mineral oil or BT (bacillus thuringiensis) instead of Sevin dust. That said, a fellow Master Gardener (Bob Osborne) recommended G90 sweet corn because it seems to be resistant to ear worms. I am glad to say that it worked well for me last year. If you do have ear worms they are usually limited to the very top of the cob and it can be broken off when shucking.

Corn will be ready to harvest about 3 weeks after the silks appear and the silks have darkened. To test, press your thumb nail into a plump kernel. It will burst with a milky white juice if it is ready. It is best harvested in the cool of the morning.

To cook, bring water to a rolling boil, add corn, bring back to a boil and cook for 3 to 4 minutes. With or without butter and salt, it is a rare treat.

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



May 2011 Herb of the Month – Herbal Pet Care

One of the many benefits of having an herb garden, especially one with a semi-cultivated area that pets are welcomed to enjoy, is the pleasure of watching them react to some of the plants. Dogs and cats will often chew on grasses to aid digestion or helpfully cause them to vomit up unhealthy foods. Many cats love catnip, cat mint and cat thyme, but they, like dogs, often freely munch on the leaves of many herbs including parsley, basil, dandelion, mint, chervil, sorrel and lemon balm – all rich in a variety of minerals and vitamins. Such snacking is often a sign that the pets are seeking certain nutrients lacking in their regular diet or they instinctively know that certain herbs also have medicinal properties to prevent or alleviate discomforts and illness.



Following are a few herbs that grow well in the North Texas climate and are beneficial to pets and animals:

Cat mints and its most noted cultivar Catnip, (*Nepeta cataria*), can cause cats to act foolish. The bruised leaves of a newly transplanted catnip plant release nepetalactone; a component of the essential oil that mimics a cat's sexual pheromones. Catnip thus acts as an aphrodisiac.

Cat thyme (*Teucrium marum*), more commonly seen in rock gardens than in herb gardens, might look like silver thyme at first glance, but your cat might think this fuzzy herb is a garden of earthly delight. Cat thyme belongs to the mint family, as does thyme. Cat thyme looks like a hairy, upright silver thyme, but actually it is in the germander genus, which consists of more than 300 species. Cat thyme achieves its cat appeal through different chemical compounds than those in catnip. The crushed leaves emit a strong fragrance suggestive of mint and camphor.

Rose hips have recently become popular as a healthy treat for pet chinchillas and guinea pigs. These small rodents are unable to manufacture their own vitamin C and are unable to digest many vitamin-C rich foods. Rose hips provide a sugarless, safe way to increase their vitamin C intake.

Rose hips are also fed to horses. The dried and powdered form can be fed at a maximum of 1 tablespoon per day to improve coat condition and new hoof growth. The rose hip, or rose haw, is the fruit of the rose plant that typically is red-to-orange, but ranges from dark purple to black in some species. Rose hips begin to form in spring after the rose flower begins to fade, and ripen in late summer through autumn. Horses and livestock will seek out wild varieties of rose hips if allowed to grow in the pasture.

Garlic is an important herb for pets (and people). It cleanses and tones the entire digestive system. By removing excess mucus from the intestinal tract it keeps worms to a minimum. External parasites are also repelled by the smell of garlic. The most effective form of garlic is the freshly chopped cloves, mixed into food. Depending on the size of your cat or dog, give ½ to 2 cloves to each pet two or three times a week.

Following is a highly nutritious recipe for a pet treat that will produce an eager and appreciative response from your pets:

Minty Cat & Dog Crunches

4 cups cooked millet	1/2 cup barley flour (or any other flour)
1/2 cup brown rice flour (or any flour)	1/4 cup yeast
1/2 cup skim milk	1/4 cup fresh or 1/8 cup dried parsley
1/2 cup fresh or 1/4 cup dried mint	1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 large clove garlic, finely chopped	1 cup wheat germ
4 cups cooked corn grits	2 tbs. seaweed powder

Mix all ingredients together except oil. When thoroughly mixed, add oil slowly. Spread mixture about 1/4 inch thick onto lightly oiled cookie sheet. Place in 400°F degree oven for 45 minutes or until crisp. Allow to cool, and break into small pieces. Store in an air-tight container in a cool place.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Lemon Beebalm

Monarda citriodora Cerv. Ex Lag.

Mint Family (Lamiaceae)

Size: 1-3 feet

Blooms: April through October, Annual/Biennial

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

The noticeable lemon fragrance of this plant led to its botanical and common name. Wherever it blooms, the scent of *Monarda* attracts butterflies and bees. A tea-like beverage can be brewed from the dried leaves or seed heads. The leaves also can contain an oil that is the basis for citronellal, an ingredient used in insect-repellent candles. From its base, lemon beebalm usually has several square, hairy stems. Long-stalked, opposite leaves may reach a length of three inches. They are narrow, with a few teeth on the edges. Numerous white, rosy-pink or light purple flowers, flecked with dark purple spores, cluster around the stem. Several clusters in series form a spike. *Monarda* often forms large colonies, covering several acres. It is common in pastures, along roadsides and in other grassy areas.

It's May - What Else Needs to be Done

By Diane Hopkins, Ellis County Master Gardener



- May is the best month of the year to plant warm-season turf in your lawn. Prior to seeding or sodding, carefully work and amend the soil.
- Okra, southern peas and sweet potatoes can be planted in your vegetable garden. Sweet potatoes will do their best in sandy soil or a raised bed that has been heavily amended with composted organic matter.
- Look for vigorous summer- and fall-flowering perennials to add to your landscape. Choose plants in a 6-inch or 1-gallon pot size and hand water several times weekly during their first summer to get them established.
- Plant warm-season, sun-tolerant annuals including hybrid purslane, firebush, zinnias, marigolds and ornamental sweet potato vine.
- Prune shrubs and vines that have finished flowering, reshaping them to a desired height and width and removing any errant spring growth.
- Prune peaches and plums by thinning. Fruit size and quality will be improved by thinning fruit five to six inches apart.
- Encourage more compact growth of blackberries, coleus, copper plant, Mexican bush sage, fall asters and mums by pinching out the growing tips of the new canes or stems.
- Continue to mow lawns to maintain recommended heights of 1 1/2 inches for common Bermuda, 2 1/2 inches for St. Augustine and about three inches for zoysias and buffalograss.
- Fertilize annuals and perennials with a high-nitrogen fertilizer, without weed killer. Apply it at the rate of one pound per 100 square feet, using a broom to brush granules off foliage and flowers and water in deeply.
- Apply a high-nitrogen, water soluble plant food to pots and hanging baskets each time that you water.
- Provide a boost to trees and shrubs by applying high-nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of one pound per cumulative inch of trunk.
- Feed turf grass with a high-nitrogen fertilizer with half of the nitrogen in a slow-release form. Water deeply after you apply the food.
- Check your junipers, cypress and other conifers for the presence of bagworm larvae; they can quickly strip the nee-

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- dles from these plants. Treat with any general- purpose insecticide as recommended on label.
- Check the backs of leaves on Boston ivy, boxwood, azalea and pyracantha for black, waxy specks of lace bug droppings. An application of a contact or systemic insecticide as recommended on label should control an infestation of this pest.
- Apply a fungicide and keep foliage as dry as possible if you notice powdery mildew on crape myrtles, zinnias and roses.
- Keeping a gardening journal will help in recording pest and disease and noting effective remedies of the problems you might encounter from year to year.



Maintaining That Beautiful Lawn

By Jim Tachias, Ellis County Master Gardener

Knowing the best cultural practices will help the homeowner obtain the desired quality landscape with a minimum of problems. By proper mowing and fertilizing, you will have that healthy lawn, and a healthy lawn is your best defense against weeds.

Mowing is key to producing a dense, healthy lawn. Mow often enough so that no more than 30% to 40% of the leaf tissue is removed. Do not catch your clippings. When you leave grass clippings on the lawn, you add nutrients and organic matter back into the soil. Keep mower blades sharpened so that you obtain a good cut and not a tearing of the leaf tissue.

Listed below are the ideal mowing heights for the different turf grasses recommended for home lawns. As a general rule, you should raise the cutting height slightly during the summer months and lower it back down in the fall.

Common Bermuda	1" to 1 ½"
Hybrid Bermuda	½" to ¾"
St. Augustine in sun	2" to 2 ½"
St. Augustine in shade	2 ½" to 3 ½"

Do not mow new grass until it is 2 to 3 inches high.

Fertilizing: A fertilization program should be based on soil test results and turfgrass requirements. Turf grasses differ in their nutrient requirements, particularly nitrogen. Desired results greatly influence the fertilization program. A high quality, dark green lawn will require more nitrogen than a lower quality turf. A lawn that is subject to heavy traffic will also require more nitrogen.

A good rule of thumb is to fertilize the lawn after you have mowed your grass twice. Fertilize St. Augustine and Bermuda lawns beginning in mid to late April. If a soil test report for the lawn has not been taken recently, it is recommended that homeowners use a complete fertilizer with a ratio of 4-1-2 or 3-1-2. An example of a 3-1-2 fertilizer would be a 15-5-10. Note the fertilizer does not always have to be an exact 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratio. Fertilize at a rate of 1.0 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. using a slow release source of nitrogen. (It's helpful to read carefully the information on the bag to determine how many square feet one bag will cover.)

The timing for the fertilization of Bermuda grass is spring, summer, and fall; for St. Augustine, spring and fall, eliminating the summer feeding. **Never use a 'weed and feed' fertilizer.**

Water the lawn thoroughly after applying the fertilizer.

Soil test forms are available at the Ellis County Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Call 972-825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu for the form and instructions on how to do it and where to send the soil. The forms will also be available at the Master Gardener booth at the Farmers Market on the Waxahachie Courthouse Square in May.

More detailed information can be found in the new "*Lawn, Garden and Landscape Manual*" prepared by the Ellis County Master Gardeners. This manual will be available at the Master Gardener Booth at the Farmers Market. Information on the planting and maintenance of other turf grasses: zoysia grass, rye grasses, buffalo grass, centipede grass, and tall fescue are also covered in the manual.

A Conversation between GOD and St. Francis

Submitted by Linda Moxley

You've probably all read this before, but it certainly bears repeating! Seriously, really think about this.....

GOD: "Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, milkweeds and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But, all I see are these green rectangles."

St. Francis: "It's the tribes that settled there, Lord; the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers 'weeds' and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass."

GOD: "Grass? But, it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees; only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?"

St. Francis: "Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn."

GOD: **GOD:** "The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass

grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy."

St. Francis: "Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it; sometimes twice a week."

GOD: **OD:** "They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?"

St. Francis: "Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags."

GOD: "They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?"

St. Francis: "No, Sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away."

GOD: "Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And, when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?"

St. Francis: "Yes, Sir."

GOD: "These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work."

St. Francis: "You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it, so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it."

GOD: "What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the

spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn, they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. It's a natural cycle of life."

St. Francis: "You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away."

GOD: "No!?! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?"

St. Francis: "After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves."

GOD: "And where do they get this mulch?"

St. Francis: "They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch."

GOD: "Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St.. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?"

St. Catherine: "Dumb and Dumber", Lord. It's a story about....

GOD: "Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis".

This and That

By Carolyn Foster, Ellis County Master Gardener

Shade - How does your garden grow? Do you have lots of sun or lots of shade? Remember sun loving plants do not do well in shade and serious shade lovers don't do well in too much sun. We do have lots of plants that will do well in part sun/part shade. Before making a choice, determine how much sun you get and is it morning, afternoon or all day sun. The afternoon sun can burn tender plants. When it comes to shade, determine what kind of shade you have. You see all shade is not created equal. To help you decide, I've listed them below:

- **Light shade:** It is completely shaded for 2 -4 hours during the heat of the day (10am – 6pm).



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- **Filtered shade:** May seem shaded all day, but sunlight squeezes through tree branches or arbors.
- **Part shade:** It receives 4 – 5 hours of shade per day; often blocked by trees or walls.
- **Full shade:** It's shaded all day; but may have reflected light from nearby sunny areas.
- **Dense shade:** These are the darkest areas with day-long shade and no reflected light.

Catalogs and plant tags will help with sun requirements, plant habits & temperature tolerances, so read before you buy.

For annuals that do well in shady conditions, look for begonias, impatiens, pentas, coleus, and caladiums. Looking for a perennial, try daffodils, purple oxalis, summer phlox, purple heart, spiderwort, crinum lilies, oxblood lilies, violets, ajuga in small areas as it is subject to root rot and fungal diseases where drainage or air circulation is poor, and hostas if you replace our native soil with a highly organic soil.

Bugs - Want to get rid of slugs, flies, mosquitoes, cutworms and other pest bugs? Invite a toad to live in your garden. They eat about 3000 per month. Provide shelter (broken clay pots) and saucer of water (toads drink through their skin so make sure they can get in) and you're good to go. You may only see them in the cool of the evening or on rainy days. Also, try to avoid chemical pesticides, which can disrupt the food supply and can be toxic to toads. Then just sit back and let them feast.



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