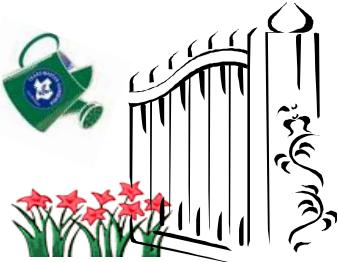




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume IV, Issue 4

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

May, 2010

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](http://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



2010 Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market  
Saturdays, May 22 - October 16

## What's Happening in May

**Saturday, May 1, 10:00 a.m.**, Petal Pushers, "Good Bugs/Bad Bugs". Val will address how to identify them, their benefits and how to control them.

**Saturday, May 1, 1:00 p.m.**, Petal Pushers, "Container Planting". Vicki will discuss and share some beautiful combinations for your garden.

**Friday, May 7**, Dallas Arboretum plant sale review (members and class attendees only)

**Saturday, May 8, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.** Dallas Arboretum Plant Sale. To review plants, go online: <http://www.dallasplanttrials.org>

**Saturday, May 22, 8:00 - 1:00** - Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market begins!

**Saturday, May 22, 8:00 a.m.**, Garden Inspirations, "Learn how to garden by square foot". Class held at the Farmer's Market; \$10.00.

**Saturday, May 29, 8:00 a.m.** - Garden Inspirations, "Organic Gardening". Class held at the Farmer's Market, \$10.00.

**Saturday, June 12, 8:00 a.m.**, Garden Inspirations, "Container Gardening". Farmer's Market: \$10.00.

**Friday, April 30, 4-8 p.m.**, Weston Gardens - "Roses, Wine (Texas) & Cheese". Bring a



## Listen to KBEC.....

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

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

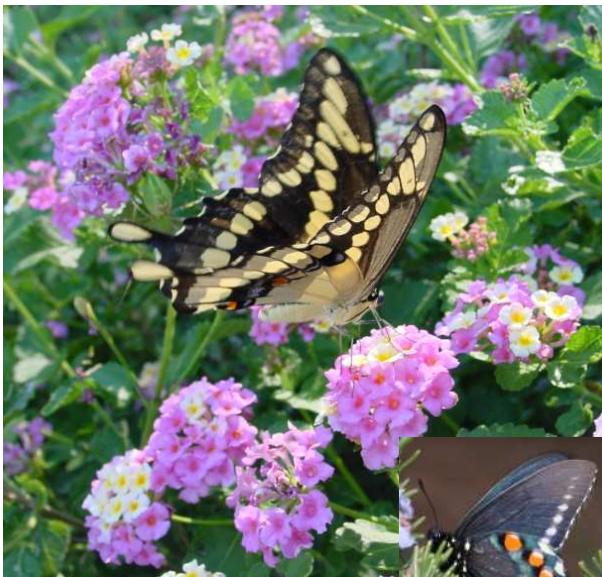
Melinda Kocian

## Inside this issue:

<i>It's May - What's Happening</i>	2
<i>Vegetable Garden Monthly</i>	3
<i>Herb of Month</i>	4
<i>May Wildflower</i>	4
<i>Onions - Going to Seed</i>	5
<i>Warning - Broomrape</i>	5
<i>Warm Season Turf Grasses</i>	6
<i>Rain Gardens</i>	7
<i>What Else?</i>	8

(Continued on page 2)

## It's May - What Needs to be Done



### Butterflies

*Photo by Pam Daniel  
And Linda Moxley*

*Butterflies are a wonderful addition to any garden. They provide beauty, pollination of flowers and create a sustainable garden environment. Featured butterflies include: Top left: Giant Swallowtail on Lantana; Middle: Pipevine Swallowtail on Rosemary; Bottom: Monarch on Blue Mist*



### Tips for May

Turf grass areas will absorb only 1/10<sup>th</sup> the rainfall of that of a forested area. When possible, plant trees and shrubs and reduce turf to allow for maximum use of natural rainfall.

#### Planting and Sowing

- Time to plant sweet potatoes. Also it's not too late for Okra.
- Now is the time to plant other hot-weather, summer blooming plants such as Mexican firebush, blue daze, succulents, purple fountain grass, Duranta, copper canyon daises, and angel's trumpet, which needs some afternoon shade. For shade, you can use torenias, elephant ears, and nicotiana.
- Wait until June to plant periwinkle (vinca)
- Spring blooming bulbs can be dug, divided and replanted. Make sure the tops have dried up before moving.

#### Pruning and Fertilizing

- Manually thin peaches, apples, pears, and plums about 5 to 6 inches apart.
- Fertilize tomatoes and most other vegetables every other week for productive and vigorous plants.
- Mow lawn grass the proper height every five days. Keep the blade sharp for a good clean cut to prevent browning at the tips.
- Deadhead roses and other reblooming plants. Feed fruit trees, perennials, annuals, ground covers and vines with a lawn fertilizer.

#### 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. Spray for early blight with a labeled insecticide as soon as it's detected.
- Horn worms on tomatoes are common and can devastate a crop. They can usually be removed by hand. Other vegetable pests can often be controlled by using cultural, physical and botanical means rather than chemical products.

#### This and That

- Maintain a 2-3 inch layer of mulch around all plants and bed areas.
- Keep it several inches away from trunks or stems of plants.
- Shredded hardwood is one of the best but any type will work, except grass clippings. They tend to mat which prevents the penetration of rain water into the soil. Instead use them in the compost pile or on garden paths

(Continued from page 1)

friend; it's free! **RSVP by Thursday, April 29 by 4:00 p.m.** Call 817-572-0549 or email [Weston@westongardens.com](mailto:Weston@westongardens.com).

#### Cedar Ridge Preserve

(for more info contact Jim Varnum at 214-543-2055 or [jеварнум@aol.com](mailto:jevarnum@aol.com).)  
7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Duncanville, TX

**Saturday, May 1, 8-10am** - Painted Bunting Walk. Marcy Brown Marsden at [mebrown@udallas.edu](mailto:mebrown@udallas.edu). Or 214-492-9409.

**Saturday, May 8, 8-10 a.m.** - Painted Bunting Walk. Marcy Brown Marsden at [mebrown@udallas.edu](mailto:mebrown@udallas.edu). Or 214-492-9409.

**Saturday, May 8, 10:00 am**, Special nature walk to observe monarch butterflies and milkweeds.

**Saturday, May 15, 9:00 a.m.**, Habitat Restoration & Trail Maintenance, [info\\_CRP@yahoo.com](mailto:info_CRP@yahoo.com)

## Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

By Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

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

Plant sweet potatoes early this month. Continue to plant hot season vegetables (okra, and black-eyed peas early to mid month. Control early blight on your tomatoes with an approved fungicide. You will notice large yellow blotches that start on the lower leaves and move up the plants. Harvest ripe crops such as squash and beans. Release green lacewings and lady bugs for general pest control. Due to the wet fall and winter we experienced, don't be surprised to see a few more bugs this spring. Keep your eyes open for any pest.

### Featured Vegetable of the Month

By Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener



### SQUASH: Vegetable of the Month



**General Information:** Squash are one of our favorites. My wife and I usually eat all year on the squash we plant in the spring. As the yellow and zucchini squash ripens, we eat what we can and freeze the rest. We make squash casserole out of the yellow squash, and zucchini bread with the zucchini. We also raise spaghetti squash and use it in place of spaghetti when making casseroles. Squash comes in summer and winter varieties. The summer squash is picked from the vine when young and tender, and the winter squash is left on the vine until ripe and mature, and they are suitable for storing. The winter type can be grown in the spring, they are just harvested at a different time.

**Planting dates:** For spring, plant after all danger of frost (4-1 to 5-15) for fall, (7-10 to 9-15).

**Planting Method:** Seed is the most common method, but can be started from transplants. Plant 3-5 seeds per hill about ½ to 1 inch deep. The bush-type squash should be planted in rows at least 3 feet apart with spacing of 24 to 30 inches between plants. Vining types need more space and should be planted in rows 6 to 8 feet apart with spacing of 36 to 40 inches between plants

**Varieties: Summer:** Multipik, Dixie, Sun Drops, Burpee's Butterstick Yellow Straightneck and Yellow Crookneck, Tatume, Butterbar, Spaghetti, and Zucchini. **Winter:** Early Butternut, Acorn, Buttercup, Tahitian, Turban, Table Ace and Hubbard.

**Culture:** Use as many plants as you have room for. Pest seem to hit the smaller plantings for some reason. Does best in sandy soil, but will grow in most any soil that is well prepared and healthy. The most common problem growing squash is pollination. Bees are the best pollinator's when available, but if you don't have enough bees at the right time, you might need to self pollinate. Use a q-tip, cotton swab or a small brush, and remove the dust like pollen from the male bloom and place in the female bloom. The male bloom comes off the end of a stem, while the female bloom has a small fruit that it protrudes from. It's best to pollinate in the morning before 10 AM. If successful, you will be eating fruit in 3-5 days.

**Fertilizer:** Heavy feeder. Use lots of compost and lava sand. Use a handful of organic fertilizer per plant. Side dress one week after blossoming begins, and repeat every three weeks. For non-organic growers, use high nitrogen fertilizers and place half on each side of the plant or in a circle around the plant.

**Harvest:** Harvest and eat summer squash anytime the fruit is large enough to eat. Best picked when young and tender. Yields are greatly reduced if mature fruit is left on the plants. Winter squash is picked when ripe and the skin is hard and impervious to scratching with your fingernail.

## Herb of the Month

*By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



### Lemon Balm – May Herb of the Month



Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) is a hardy perennial in the south growing to a large mound about 24 inches high and 3 feet wide. Lemon Balm prefers some shade in the afternoon and needs well-drained soil. Lemon Balm spreads vegetatively as well as by seed. In our zone 8 the plant will die back at the start of winter, but will resprout in the spring. It can be easily grown from stem cuttings rooted in water, or from seeds. Under ideal conditions, it will seed itself prolifically and can become a nuisance in the garden but is not as invasive as mint.

The genus *Melissa* has many representatives in Europe, Middle Asia and North America. The name is from the Greek word signifying honey bee, indicating the plant's attraction for these insects. Therefore the plant will assist in pollination in the garden.

Lemon Balm leaves are used as a flavoring in herbal teas, ice cream, and as a garnish in fruit salads. Its delicate flavor is lost in cooking or drying. Enjoy its lemony flavor with chicken salad, cold soups, fish, herbal vinegars and tossed salad for a summer treat.

Medicinally the crushed leaves are rubbed on the skin to repel mosquitoes. It is claimed to have antibacterial and antiviral properties. As an herbal tea it is believed to have a calming effect. Lemon Balm essential oil is very popular in aromatherapy to relax and rejuvenate.

## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



*Phlox spp.*

**Phlox Family (polemoniaceae)**

### **Phlox**

**Range:** 1-10 (Ellis County is zone 4)

**Size:** 8-20 inches

**Blooms:** February - June, Annual/Perennial

One or more species of *Phlox* can be found nearly anywhere in Texas, with twelve species and nineteen subspecies in the state. *Phlox pilosa* is pictured. Individual species may be difficult for the amateur to distinguish, but they are easy to recognize, but they are easy to recognize as a group. Color is variable, but most are pink, while others may be white, violet, blue, or red. Five petals flare from an evenly narrow tube to a flattened "tray". Petals of some species have pointed tips, some are notched, but all widen toward the outer edge. Flowers are numerous, and only a few open at a time in the lower portion of the plants. *Phlox* forms broad colonies, and most species reseed readily. These plants are frequently seen with bluebonnet, blue-eyed grass, paintbrush and other spring wildflowers, brightening the landscape with strong splashes of color.



## Onions Going to Seed Early

By Melinda Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener



**W**e put our onions in earlier than we usually do. They have been doing great; however, some of them have started going to seed.

Flowering of onions can be caused by several things but usually the most prevalent is temperature fluctuation, which is definitely what we have experienced this year. An onion is classed as a biennial which means it normally takes 2 years to go from seed to seed. Temperature is the controlling or triggering factor in this process. If an onion plant is exposed to alternating cold and warm temperatures resulting in the onion plant going dormant, resuming growth, going dormant and then resuming growth again, the onion bulbs prematurely flower or bolt. The onion is deceived into believing it has completed two growth cycles or years of growth in its biennial life cycle so it finalizes the cycle by blooming. Flowering can be controlled by planting the right variety at the right time. Use only transplants that are pencil-sized or smaller in diameter when planting in early spring or always plant seed, NEVER transplants in early fall in Texas Zones III – V (USDA Zones 8 and 9).

What can one do if flower stalks appear? Should the flower stalks be removed from the onion plants? Suit yourself but once the onion plant has bolted, or sent up a flower stalk, there is nothing you can do to eliminate this problem. The onion bulbs will be edible but smaller. Use these onions as soon as possible because the green flower stalk which emerges through the center of the bulb will make storage almost impossible.

Onions are fully mature when their tops have fallen over. After pulling from the ground allow the onion to dry, clip the roots and cut the tops back to one inch. The key to preserving onions and to prevent bruising is to keep them cool, dry and separated. In the refrigerator, wrapped separately in foil, onions can be preserved for as long as a year. The best way to store onions is in a mesh bag or nylon stocking. Place an onion in the bag and tie a knot or put a plastic tie between the onions and continue until the stocking is full. Loop the stocking over a rafter or nail in a cool dry building and when an onion is desired, simply clip off the bottom onion with a pair of scissors or remove the plastic tie. Another suggestion is to spread the onions out on a screen which will allow adequate ventilation, but remember to keep them from touching each other. As a general rule, the sweeter the onion, the higher the water content, and therefore the less shelf life. A more pungent onion will store longer, so eat the sweet varieties first and save the more pungent onions for storage.



## Warning - Broomrape Discovered in Ellis County

By Lee Gabor, Ellis County Master Gardener



In June, 2008, the Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter contained an article warming residents to be on the lookout for this parasitic plant. At that time, Ellis County was not mentioned as one of the 22 counties in which Broomrape had been found.



Unfortunately, our county is now infected. At the Bluebonnet Festival in Ennis, Saturday, April 17, members of the Ennis Garden Club brought to the Master Gardener booth plastic bags containing Broomrape plants found on County Road 660 near Bristol. Concern is the plant will spread throughout the county and affect various plants or possibly cause total crop failure.

Broomrape (*Orobanche*) is a genus of over 200 species. The family is Orobanchaceae and the plants are mostly found in the temperate Northern Hemisphere. Broomrape does not contain chlorophyll and, therefore, must depend upon other plants for its life existence. The plant seed puts out root-like growth and attaches to the roots of various broadleaf species and becomes a parasite to that healthy plant, eventually killing the host.

The plant typically is seen from late February or early March to May. It peaks in April. Flowering plants affected include Engelmann daisy, burr clover, blue bonnet and wild geranium. Several crop plants that are parasitized are tomato, eggplant, potato, cabbage, coleus, bell pepper, sunflower, celery, and bean. In heavily infested areas, Branched Broomrape can cause total crop failure.

### HOW TO RECOGNIZE BROOMRAPE

The plant is small, between 4 to 12 inches tall. It is best recognized by its yellow or straw-colored stems and blue or white snapdragon-like flowers. The leaves are triangular flaps. The seeds are very small and are tan to brown. Seeds blacken with age.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND THE PLANT

It is very important to **NEVER PULL UP THE PLANT OR CARRY IT AROUND LOOSE**. Seeds could fall from the plant and infect the areas on which you walk. Instead, it is wise to mark with a flag or stake the spot where plants are found and write the exact location on a card. Please be very specific. This card should be taken to the Ellis County AgriLife Extension office or information emailed to [Ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:Ellis-tx@tamu.edu). The extension office is located at 701 South I-35, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165. Telephone is 972-825-5175 and Fax is 972-825-5184.

## Landscape Gardening

By Gail Hayes, Ellis County Master Gardener



### Warm-Season Turfgrasses

#### Common bermudagrass:

- Narrow-leaved, vigorous perennial that will turn green when soil temperatures rise above 60 degrees and go dormant with the cool fall temperatures, turning brown after frost.
- Spreads from runners, rhizomes and seeds and is prone to creep into flowerbeds and sidewalks.
- Fairly salt tolerant and does not grow in medium to dense shade.
- Optimum daytime temperature for bermudagrass is between 95° and 100°
- Bermudagrass grows well on a wide variety of soils from heavy clays to deep sands; it tolerates both acid and alkaline soil conditions. Bermudagrass survives some flooding but does best on well-drained sites.
- Bermudagrass roots can grow to a depth of six feet or more depending on soil profile characteristics.
- Light, frequent irrigations produce shallow-rooted grass that shows drought stress very rapidly. When a turf needs to be watered, apply enough to wet the soil to a depth of 4" to 6".
- Mow at a height of 1" turf growth.
- Bermudagrasses have a relatively high fertilizer requirement to maintain a high level of turf quality. The faster the turf grows, the more water it requires. Slow release fertilizers that contain materials like sulfur-coated urea or urea formaldehyde as nitrogen sources do not produce high growth rates. Avoid heavy applications of fertilizers high in soluble nitrogen.
- Soil tests are required to determine phosphorus, potassium, calcium and other nutrient deficiencies. Potassium is particularly important because of its contribution to root growth, environmental stress tolerance (heat, cold and drought) and wear tolerance. Potassium has also been found to reduce susceptibility of bermudagrass to leaf spot diseases.
- Bermudagrass tolerates a wide range in soil reaction, but performs best between pH 6.5 and 8.0.
- Common bermudagrass and selections from common generally have a lower nitrogen requirement than the hybrid bermudagrasses.
- Pest Problems. Bermudagrass tolerates a wide range of environmental conditions and survives in nature where fertility and rainfall are adequate and winter temperatures are not too low. Bermudagrass does have numerous pest problems, however, which tend to increase with higher levels of management. High nitrogen fertilization rates, close mowing and frequent irrigation tend to increase the susceptibility of bermudagrass to insects and diseases.
- Serious insect pests that feed on the foliage of bermudagrass include armyworms, cutworms, sod webworms, bermudagrass mites and Rhodegrass scale (mealybug). Under good management bermudagrass can tolerate low populations of most of these insects.

**Zoysiagrass:** This turfgrass is native to the Orient. It is not as shade-tolerant as St. Augustine, but it is wear-resistant and more cold tolerant than bermudagrass. It has a fairly low growth rate and spreads by both rhizomes and stolons. It requires longer to spread than bermudagrass and St. Augustine. It requires mowing as often as bermudagrass. Zoysiagrass is used for home lawns and golf courses. Three different varieties of Zoysiagrass are found in Texas, and these include Merald, Meyer and Japanese lawnglass. Emerald has a much finer leaf blade than Meyer and forms a dense, dark-green turf that is dense-growing. The leaf blade of Meyer is a little wider than that of Common bermudagrass, and it also forms a dense turf.

**Common St. Augustine:** St Augustine's best attribute is its outstanding shade tolerance. It is usually established by sod, but plugs of newer varieties are now available. It spreads quickly by stolon but has low wear tolerance.

- Is susceptible to lawn diseases, notably large brown patch, St. Augustine Decline and gray leaf spot.
- Is more susceptible to iron chlorosis than bermudagrass.
- Is attacked by insects (chinch bugs and white grubs)
- Will not survive at temperatures as low as those bermudagrass will tolerate. Is a coarse-textured grass.

**Buffalograss:** This is the only turf grass native to the North American Great Plains from Texas to Canada. It spreads by stolon. It has fine leaf blades that are bluish green in color. It does not form as dense a turf as bermudagrass, and if left unmowed, it does not reach more than 4 or 5 inches in height. It can survive extreme drought conditions but may turn brown during dry summer periods and green up again when it rains. It can be used for golf course parks, roughs or other low-maintenance areas. It does not grow well in sandy or acidic type soils and its shade tolerance is fair to poor. Buffalograss used as a turf tolerates infrequent mowing, is not aggressive and is easily removed from flowerbeds and gardens and is very drought-tolerant.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

## **GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR MAY**

- Now is a good time to create summer containers exhibiting succulents such as echeverias, sedums or house leeks (*semperfervivums*). The larger rosettes of the echeverias and *semperfervivums* may be situated in the container with edgings of smaller-leaved sedums.
- Succulents are easy to re-do and invigorate at almost any time of the year. Trim off the heads leaving about 1" of bare stem below, then situate into a pot in good soil media and press firmly in place. Do not overwater until new growth has become established.
- Cut off old blossoms on spring flowering annuals, such as pansies, snapdragons, stock and calendulas, to prolong the flowering season.
- Continue to fertilize roses every four to six weeks with small amounts of a balanced fertilizer.
- Allow foliage of spring flowering bulbs to mature and yellow before removing.
- Set out plants of hybrid portulaca (purslane) in sunny areas. Make rooted cuttings of your favorite colors by placing 3 to 4 inch stems in moist, sandy soils.
- It is not too late to sow directly into the soil seeds of sunflower, zinnia, morning glory, portulaca, marigold, cosmos, periwinkles and gourds. Achimenes, cannas, dahlias and other summer flowering bulbs can also be planted in May.
- Pinch back the terminal growth on newly planted annual and perennial plants. This will result in shorter, more compact, better branched plants with more flowers.
- Plant caladium tubers, petunias, impatiens, begonias and torenias in well prepared shady areas.
- Make cuttings of your favorite chrysanthemums and root them in a mixture of sand and peat moss. Cover cutting box with plastic and place in shaded area for 5 to 6 days to prevent wilting.
- Replace or replenish mulch materials in flower beds and shrub borders to conserve moisture and reduce weed growth.



### **Beneficial Rain Gardens**

By Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



So what is a rain garden? It's a garden in a shallow depression, made specifically to collect and filter rain water. Water doesn't stand in a rain garden, but trickles through the soil. Oil, chemicals and other pollutants are filtered and stopped by soil particles or taken up by roots.

They are designed to have a level, flat bottom and hold up to a 2 or 3 inch rainfall event and shallow enough to have the water infiltrate the soil within 24 hours so there is no mosquito problem.

Rain gardens soak up rain water, mainly from your roof, but also from your driveway and lawn. They are landscaped areas planted to wildflowers and other native vegetation to replace areas of lawn. The gardens fill with a few inches of water and allow the water to slowly filter into the ground rather than running off to storm drains. Compared to a patch of conventional lawn, a rain garden allows about 30 percent more water to soak into the ground.

Holding back the runoff helps prevent pollutants such as fertilizers from washing from your yard into storm sewers, and eventually into nearby streams and lakes. By reducing the amount of water that enters the local storm drain systems, rain gardens can also reduce the chances for local flooding, as well as bank and shoreline damage where storm drains empty into streams and lakes.

You can help in your own yard by simply building one or more rain gardens to collect runoff from your roof. Rain water can sometimes be collected from your driveway or sloping lawn by locating a rain garden in a spot where the water naturally drains.

When choosing a location, consider the proximity of the rain garden to foundations, the placement relative to downspouts, the slope of the ground, existing vegetation, views from the house and views from the street. A rain garden should be at least 10 feet from any foundation or structure to ensure that water does not seep under the foundation. Locate it in full to partial sun to speed evaporation and infiltration. Maintain at least 4 feet of turf grass or rocks between your downspout and garden to act as a filter catching any debris coming off your roof, and to slow down the force of the water. For a rain garden a further distance from the house (maybe 30 ft.) a shallow swale can be used to direct the water from the downspout to the garden. The rain garden is dug 4 to 8 inches in depth with care to make the bottom as level as possible. The soil that is removed can be used to create a berm on the downhill side of the slope. With the lawn sloping gently away from the house, the garden is positioned to trap water from the downspout.

Design your rain garden as you would a regular garden, selecting plants of different heights and different bloom times so it will be attractive throughout the season. Select 1 or 2 year old plants with well established root systems. Plants native to your region are the best choices for your landscape because their water requirements are usually met by normal rainfall amounts. Rain gardens are great habitats for birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects.

(Continued on page 8)

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

By Dee Stroope, Ellis County Master Gardener



Since gardening is fun, treat yourself to at least one great new plant before the best selection of plants is gone. Plant or transplant trees and shrubs before the heat of summer. Plant berry bushes for a late harvest.

Some hints for your landscape:

- Start digging that pond you've been talking about.
- Clean out the bird feeders.
- Turn the compost.
- Plant new roses.
- Replace cool season annuals with heat lovers (marigold, cosmos, sunflower, tithonia, Nicotiana, verbena, and zinnias).
- Rip out those invasive plants while the soil is damp, before they spread even further.

It's not too late to plant summer blooming plants. For shade, you can use torenias, elephant ears, and nicotiana. Spring blooming bulbs can be dug, divided and replanted. Make sure that the tops have dried up before moving them.

Fertilize your tomatoes and most other vegetables every other week for productive and vigorous plants. Horn worms on tomatoes are common and can devastate a crop. They can usually be removed by hand. Other vegetable pests can often be controlled by using other means rather than chemical products.

Mow your lawn grass the proper height every five days. Bermuda grass should be cut to a height of 1-1/2 inches and St. Augustine to a height of 2-1/2 inches. Keep the blade sharp for a good clean cut to prevent browning at the tips.

It's time to plant sweet potatoes and it's not too late to plant okra. It's also time to plant other hot-weather summer blooming plants such as Mexican firebush, blue daze, succulents, purple fountain grass, copper canyon daisies, and angel's trumpet, which needs some afternoon shade.

Manually thin your peaches, apples, pears and plums to about 5 to 6 inches apart, so they have enough room to develop in size.

Look for insects and diseases on tomatoes and other crops. Early detection is very important. Keep the soil moist enough to prevent blossom end rot on tomatoes. Spray for early blight with a labeled insecticide as soon as it's detected.

It's time to direct-seed warm season vegetables (melons, beans, okra, squash, southern peas) for a mid-summer harvest. Make sure you water your newly planted plants even if rain is predicted.

Some flowering annuals for May planting include calliopsis, celosia, coleus, crossandra, gaillardia, gazania, hollyhock (one of my favorites) impatiens, kalanchoe, marigold, ornamental peppers, pentas, salvia, verbena and zinnias. To keep them blooming, fertilize monthly with a 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 type of fertilizer.

Avoid using dust insecticide formulations in your garden since these materials never dry and bees are easily killed by them. Liquid insecticides, applied late in the afternoon when bee activity is less, will be best for the bees.

(Continued from page 7)

The rain garden should be constructed with about a 2 to 1 length to width ratio. A good workable size would be a 7 x 15 foot, or 10 x 20 foot, with the length of the garden parallel with the house or structure. In our clay soil, tilling in some type of organic matter (compost, leaves, etc.) will loosen the soil and make it more permeable. Applying 2 to 3 inches of hardwood mulch will make maintaining your garden easier for it will keep it moist, protect your plants, and discourage weeds.

Rain gardens can be your personal contribution to cleaner water, healthier fish and wildlife, and a greatly improved environment for our children. Your rain garden may seem small, but collectively they produce substantial neighborhood and regional environmental benefits.

Rain gardens work for us in several ways by:

- Increasing the amount of water filtering into the ground, which recharges groundwater and helps reduce the amount of pollutant washing off to lakes and streams
- Helping sustain adequate flows in streams during dry spells
- Providing valuable wildlife habitats
- Enhancing the beauty of your yard and the neighborhood
- Helping protect communities from flooding and drainage problems
- Helping protect streams and lakes from damaging flows and reducing erosion of the stream banks and lakeshores
- Reducing the need for costly municipal storm water treatment structures

Water is a valuable resource and every effort should be made to conserve and protect it. Installing a rain garden is one way to do that.



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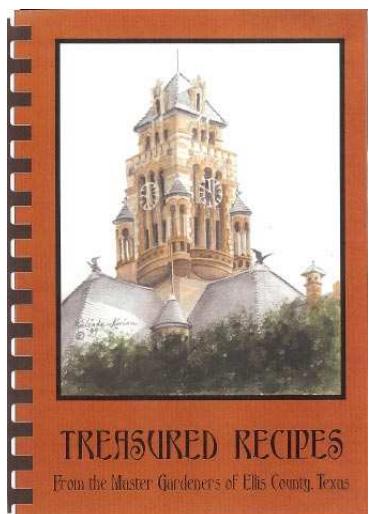
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