



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume II, Issue 8

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

October, 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](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



## What's Happening in October?

### **Cedar Ridge Preserve**

**Saturday, Oct. 4, 9:00 am.** - Beginning bird watching field day. For info or to RSVP contact Marcy Brown Marsden, [biomarcy@winwaed.com](mailto:biomarcy@winwaed.com), or 214-492-9409.

**Saturday, Nov. 15** - for those who cannot participate on weekdays. RSVP same as above.

### **Garden Inspirations -**

**Friday, October 17** - chili cook-off. To enter, call 214-466-6862 or email [duchess@gardeninspirations-tx.com](mailto:duchess@gardeninspirations-tx.com). \$15.00 entries due by October 14th.

**Nov 1 and 2 - Christmas Retreat.** Wild Cedar Farm. Several hands-on workshops and much more. 2 full days of inspirational activities plus 1-overnight stay. For more information, visit the website: [www.gardeninspirations-tx.com](http://www.gardeninspirations-tx.com) or email: [duchess@gardeninspirations-tx.com](mailto:duchess@gardeninspirations-tx.com), or call 214-466-6862.

### **Petal Pusher's Garden Emporium**, 813 Straus Rd., Cedar Hill, 972-291-7650

**Saturday, October 4, 10:30 a.m.** - Organic Gardening. Speaker: John Dromgoole. John is the owner of the Natural Gardener Nursery in Austin and of Lady Bug Natural brand products. He has been deeply involved in the advancement of organic gardening and environmental issues for 30+ years. His gardens have been featured in Texas Highway, Herb Companion and Fine Gardening magazines. John hosts a radio show: Gardening Naturally and has been on the air in Austin for 25 years.

**Saturday, October 4, 1:30 p.m.** - Fall Container Gardening. Speaker: Vicki Thaxton. Our own Vicki will host a very informal get-together, to talk about cool season color. We'll discuss color combinations, containers, and will put together some beautiful fall displays.

**Tuesday, October 14, 7:00 pm - The Greenery.** Green Thumb Organics Organization; public welcome. Speaker: Arlene Hamilton on "Culinary Herbs".

**Tuesday, October 16, 7:00 - The Native Plant Society**, Waxahachie Parks Dept. Meeting Room. Speaker: John Snowden, owner of the Blue Stem Nursery, "Saving Seeds from Native Plants".

**Dallas Arboretum - Pansy Trial - Help needed.** We need 10 or more volunteers each week to come help us record flower count. Dates where help is needed are every Tuesday, December 1, 2008 through March 30, 2009. Contact Denise Robb, Greenhouse and Research Manager, 214-555-6586 or [drobb@dallasarboretum.org](mailto:drobb@dallasarboretum.org).

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### **Listen to KBEC.....**

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

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

Be sure to listen in!

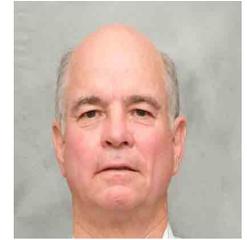
Melinda Kocian

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**For Immediate Release:**

Date: September, 2008  
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**Watch for Armyworms in Pastures and Lawns**

Glen C. Moore, Extension Agent – IPM, Texas AgriLife Extension

Scattered outbreaks of fall armyworm have been reported infesting Bermuda grass pastures, wheat and lawns in north central Texas. The fall armyworm is often most abundant during August through early November in our area. When present in large numbers, caterpillars can consume a pasture, crop or lawn in a short period of time. Much of the following are excerpts from an Armyworm Fact Sheet produced by Dr. Allen Knutson, Extension Entomologist.

**Eggs.** Eggs are laid in masses of up to 50 eggs on the grass leaves and are difficult to find. The eggs are covered with the grey scales from the moths body, giving the egg mass a fuzzy appearance. Eggs hatch in 2-3 days.

**Caterpillar.** Fall armyworms are green, brown or black. A distinct white line between the eyes forms an inverted Y pattern on the face. There are four black spots aligned in a square on the top of the 8th segment near the back end of the caterpillar. Armyworms are very small at first, cause little plant damage and as a result, infestations often go unnoticed. Larvae feed for 2-3 weeks and full grown larvae reach about 1 to 1.5 inches long. Armyworms consume 80% of their total food intake during the last few days of development. Given their immense appetite, great numbers, and marching ability, armyworms can damage entire fields or pastures in a few days. Once the armyworm completes feeding, it tunnels into the soil about an inch and enters the pupa stage.

**Pupa.** The full grown armyworm tunnels into the soil and transforms to the pupae, an inactive, non-feeding stage. In 7-10 days, the moth emerges from the pupa and repeats the life cycle.

**Moth.** The fall armyworm moth has a wingspan of about 1 inch. The front pair of wings are dark gray with an irregular pattern of light and dark areas. Moths are active at night and common around lights at night. A single female can deposit up to 2000 eggs. Development from egg to adult requires about 4 weeks during the summer and is longer during cool weather. There are several generations a year. Development ends with cold weather in November.

**Management.**

It is important to detect fall armyworm infestations early before they cause economic damage. Fall armyworm larvae feed primarily during the night and during cloudy weather. During the day, look for armyworms under loose soil and fallen leaves on the ground. The presence of chewed leaves can indicate the presence of armyworms. Small larvae chew the green layer from the leaves and leave a clearing or window pane effect and consume only a small amount of foliage. Consequently, infestations may go unnoticed unless the field is closely inspected. Once larvae are greater than 3/4 inch, the quantity of leaves they eat increases dramatically. During the final 2-3 days of feeding, armyworms consume 80% of the total foliage consumed during their entire development. For this reason, extensive feeding damage can occur in a few days. The density of armyworms sufficient to justify insecticide treatment will depend on the stage of crop growth and value of the crop. Seedling plants can tolerate fewer armyworms than established plants. Infestations of 2-3 armyworms per square foot may justify treatment. Hot, dry weather and natural enemies limit armyworm populations.

**Labeled Insecticides for Armyworm Control in Pastures and Hayfields.**

Always read and follow all label instructions on pesticide use and restrictions.

**Malathion** 57% and Malathion ULV. Zero days to harvest or grazing.

**Mustang Max** (9.6% zeta-cypermethrin). The first pyrethroid insecticide labeled on pastures and hay fields. Applications may be made up to 0 days for forage and hay, 7 days for straw and seed screenings. Labeled for a large number of insect pests, including armyworms, grasshoppers

**Tracer.** Do not allow cattle to graze until spray has dried. Do not harvest hay or fodder for 3 days after treatment. There is no pre-harvest interval for forage. Treat when eggs hatch or when larvae are small. Use higher rates for larger larvae.

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**Sevin 4F, Sevin XLR, Sevin 80S, Generic Carbaryl.** When applied to pastures, there is a 14 day waiting period before grazing/harvest.

**Dimilin 2L.** Wait one day until harvest. Label does not list a restriction on grazing. To be effective, Dimilin must be applied before larvae reach 1/2 inch or longer. Will not control larger larvae. Provides residual control for up to 2-3 weeks, as long as forage is not removed from field. Dimilin acts as an insect growth regulator.

**Intrepid 2F.** Do not harvest hay within 7 days of application. There is no pre-harvest interval for forage. Begin applications when first signs of feeding damage appear. Use higher rates for heavier infestations. Intrepid is an insect growth regulator.

**Lannate.** Bermuda grass only. Do not apply within 7 days of feeding forage or allowing livestock to graze. Do not apply within 3 days of cutting for hay. Lannate is a highly toxic POISON and all label precautions must be carefully followed. A restricted use pesticide.

**Labeled Insecticides for Armyworm Control in Wheat and Small Grains include:**

Baythroid, carbaryl, Lannate, Lorsban, Mustang Max, methyl parathion, Proxis and Tracer. Refer to label for restrictions on grazing and harvesting treated crops.

**Insecticides for Armyworm Control in Lawns:**

Insecticide labeled in lawns and turf include halofenozide (Mach® 2), bifenthrin (Talstar®), cyfluthrin (Tempo®, Bayer Advanced®), carbaryl (Sevin®) permethrin (multiple brands) and spinosad (Conserve® and others).

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## Bringing your Houseplants Back Indoors

by Diane Hopkins  
Ellis County Master Gardener



The days are getting shorter and nights are turning cooler, these are signs that the first frost can't be far away. Since temperatures below 50 degrees can stress some tropical plants, it's time to bring back inside any house plants that you placed outside to soak up the bright light and fresh air during the spring and summer months. To help the plants readjust to indoor conditions bring them in at night and move them back outside during the day for the first week. This routine helps plants prepare for the changes in humidity, air circulation, and temperature.

The first step to bringing in houseplants is cleaning them. Remove damaged leaves and spent flowers. Prior to bringing in, submerge the pot in a large bucket of tepid water for a minute or two; this will get rid of hidden bugs in the soil, cleans the pot and waters the plant. Then closely inspect them for insects and disease. If you should notice any you should treat the problem before bringing indoors. If the use of a pesticide or fungicide is warranted, always be sure to read and carefully follow the instructions on the container label.

Once cleaned, the plants are ready to be brought indoors. Bright-light plants should be placed in south or west windows. Lower-light plants can be placed in north or east windows or on tables near a window. Most homes have low humidity levels, so place plant pots on a shallow tray filled with pebbles and enough water to reach just below the surface of the pebbles. As the water evaporates it will raise the humidity around the plants.

After you bring your plants in they will have a period of acclimation. You may notice yellow leaves and dropping blossoms. Keep the soil moist and the environment consistent. Always use slightly warm water; cold or hot water can damage the roots and foliage.

As winter approaches and temperatures fall below freezing monitor the temperature around any plants that you have placed on windowsills. You may need to move them to a warmer location away from excessive cold or drafts.

Houseplants add life and warmth to our home, keeps us in touch with nature and cleans our indoor air. Keeping them healthy and happy provides a sense of accomplishment, which in turn keeps us happy.



## Why Old Roses?

By Rosemary Morgeson, Ellis County Master Gardener

Old roses are varieties that were popular in centuries past before the Hybrid Teas were developed. Many of them bloom for only one period a year, (often in June), although a few do undergo multiple or constant blooming throughout the season, Old roses tend to be very hardy. Other names used for old roses include "Old-Fashioned Roses," "Antique Roses," "Heirloom Roses," and "Heritage Roses."

Old roses tend to be very fragrant and have far more varieties of fragrance and form than Hybrid Teas. Antique or Heirloom Roses are those varieties that were cultivated before 1867. Roses themselves date back to the Middle Ages.

Old roses can be found in old cemeteries, old homesteads and along roadsides where they are left neglected, I'm sure, for many years. Old roses have increased in their popularity in the last 20 years due to their ability to flourish despite neglect.

You can purchase many varieties of old roses but my favorite method of propagation is cuttings from existing bushes. If you get the urge to do some "rose rustling", it's always good to get permission from the owner!

My story of old roses is really a love story. My first love was the "Peace Rose" which was developed by a French horticulturist named Francis Meilland in the years 1935 to 1939. Although the 'Peace' rose is a Hybrid Tea it is more than 70 years old and along with old rose varieties is one of my favorites. I first met this rose at the age of 16 and I knew then that I would always have to have roses in my gardens.

When Meilland foresaw the German invasion of France he sent cuttings to friends in Italy, Turkey, Germany, and the United States to protect the new rose. This rose became known as "Peace" in the following way. Early in 1945 Meilland wrote to Field Marshal Alan Brooke (later Viscount Alanbrooke), the principal author of the master strategy that won Second World War, to thank him for his key part in the liberation of France and to ask if Brooke would give his name to the rose. Brooke declined saying that, though he was honored to be asked, his name would soon be forgotten and a much better and more enduring name would be "Peace".

The name "Peace" is a trade name; its formal cultivar name is Rosa 'Madame A. Meilland'. The adoption of the trade name "Peace" was publicly announced in the United States on April 29, 1945. This was the very day that Berlin fell. Later that year Peace roses were given to each of the delegations at the inaugural meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco, each with a note that read, "We hope the 'Peace' rose will influence men's thoughts for everlasting world peace".

I myself have done some "rose rustling" and it is very rewarding to have a "Peace" of history blooming in my garden!

Tidbit from Rosemary: "Strawberry's are neither a fruit nor a berry; they are a large receptacle of a flower"

## Ten Fall Gardening Tips

By Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener

- A plant is only as strong as the soil allows. With our heavy clay soils (black gumbo), compost is the miracle cure. All garden pots and bed areas will be more productive if you mix 3-4 inches of compost as deep as practical. Compost should be worked into one's soil every time plantings are changed.
- Fall is a great opportunity to control those difficult perennial weeds like nutsedge, Bermuda grass, or poison ivy. Options include hand digging, or treatments of specific herbicides, glyphosate (Round Up type materials) or Man- age (for nutsedge) just to name two.
- Leaves are a valuable asset in our garden, either as mulch or when converted to compost. Gather and stockpile leaves in a compost heap; a 6-inch layer of leaves and a 6-inch layer of plant trimmings or other green material. Repeat layers. Add a cup or 2 of fertilizer and wet the heap thoroughly. Keep wet via rainfall or hand watering every 3 to 5 days. Come next spring the material on top will be mulch and the bottom will be compost.
- Perennial plants that bloom in the spring and summer can be divided now. Iris, daylilies, and Shasta daisies can be divided now. Dig the clumps, separate, and replant in new locations.
- Planning to add wildflowers to your landscape? Prepare the spots now and plant in early October. Plant seeds at a depth of less than ½ inch.



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- Broccoli, cabbage, kale, and collards are among the most dependable winter veggies. Other good choices include: carrots, turnips, radishes, lettuce, and spinach. Plant in September and October. Remember to use a row cover during several cold and ice storms.
- Don't over water your fall or spring garden. Place mulch around the plants after setting out and have fewer weeds, grass, and stronger plants. Fertilize lightly with a 3-2-1 ratio fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks.
- Perennial herbs need to sit out in September and October. Thyme, oregano, rosemary, parsley, and Mexican mint marigold work best. Water after setting herbs out but not too much. Fertilize next spring.
- Newly set out plants are favorite targets of foliage feeding caterpillars. Control sprays containing BT (an all natural substance) is effective and low toxicity. Insecticidal soaps and insecticides labeled for vegetables are also safe to use. Always follow label directions and wash your hands following use.
- Involve your kids or grand kids or neighbor kids in your fall landscaping and gardening efforts. Be a teacher! Pass on what you have learned to the next generation. Be creative and you will create a memory for our next generation of gardeners.

## Wildflowers - It's All a Matter of Timing

By Betty Reuscher

Ellis County Master Gardener



Wildflowers don't happen overnight. In fact, a meadow of wildflowers had its start in the fall when the soil was prepared and seeds were sown. Planning for a wildflower meadow for next spring should begin now with the sowing of the seeds. Then stand back and watch the show in the spring.

The Ellis County Master Gardeners recommend six steps to successful wildflower gardening.

- **Step One: Select the site now.** Select a site that will have full sun for most of the day; at least 6 hours of sun is best. Since most Texas wildflowers don't like wet feet, select a spot with good drainage. Begin the site selection now for flowers next spring- it's not too early.
- **Step Two: Clear the land and prepare the soil.** Seeds have the best chance for germination when they fall on bare soil; so begin now. Eliminate all plant matter from the site. Grass and broad leaf weeds and plants may be removed by applying a glyphosate product (Roundup). After a few days, lightly till the area to remove remaining plants. Be aware that deep tilling may bring up undesirable weed and grass seeds. After leveling the site, you have completed the preparation. No added soil amendments are necessary.
- **Step Three: Check the catalogs and select the seeds.** Seeds may be purchased as mixes (North Central Texas Mix) or single variety packets. Many nurseries have appropriate seed mixtures available beginning the first of September. Even though some wildflowers reseed, it is wise to purchase fresh seeds every year.
- **Step Four: Sow the seeds in the fall.** The best time for sowing seeds in North Texas is between late September and December. Seeds sown later than December 1 may not germinate and give time for strong roots to form. Mix the seeds with sand for easy, even spreading; the sand shows up well on the surface of the soil to let you know where the seeds are. Sow seeds by hand going in one direction and resow the entire area again walking in a perpendicular direction.
- **Step Five: Insure seed contact with the soil.** After seeds and sand have been spread, tamp the soil to be sure the seeds have firm contact with the soil. For larger areas, a roller filled with water may be needed.
- **Step Six: Water when necessary.** Moisture is necessary during germination and early seedling stages especially if there is insufficient rainfall. Rosettes may form and stay green throughout the winter. Watch for them.

It's that easy. No need to add soil amendments or fertilize. These plants are very well adapted to living here. Enjoy the process and the results.

For a list of the appropriate wildflowers for this area or more information on how to plant a wildflower meadow, contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners at the Texas AgriLife Extension Service Office, 972-825-5175.



## Waxahachie Downtown Farmers' Market

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



This week the market will be filled with fall produce, fruits and vegetables, plus lots of gourds, squash, Indian corn and corn stalks ready for your home decorating. The pumpkins, gourds and squash come in all sizes, shapes and colors. Last week we purchased a Cinderella pumpkin which looks like all it needs is the touch of a fairy godmother to turn it into a beautiful coach. We also bought a turban squash, cleaned out the seeds, and used it as a container for a veggie dip. Other varieties of winter squash at the market are acorn, spaghetti, butternut, and Hubbard. They are all delicious. Try a variety you haven't tried before.

Pumpkins and squash are members of the Cucurbitaceae family and have an edible flower and fruit. For cooking, choose ones that feel solid and heavy for its size. The skin should be hard, with no cracks, blemishes or soft spots. The greatest challenge to cooking a pumpkin is cutting it open. Steady it on a thick towel, very carefully insert a large, heavy knife near the stem, and cut down through the curved side. Always cut away from yourself. Turn the pumpkin and repeat. Scrape out the seeds and fibrous strings. You can peel the outer skin off, cut the flesh into chunks and simmer in water until tender then drain thoroughly. I prefer to bake the unpeeled halves, skin side up in a large pan, with about half an inch of water added, in a 350° oven, until tender (about 1 hour).

Also at the market you will find sweet potatoes, okra, peas and beans, apples, and pears. The tomatoes are still delicious but won't last much longer. Don't forget to stock up on all our wonderful preserves, salsas, jams and jellies, as well as the other gourmet mixes. Check out the fresh coffee from Beca House. Pick up a bouquet of fresh cut flowers from Marilyn at Garden Inspirations. Her beautiful creations include mums, zinnias and wild flowers in vibrant autumn colors.

Ok, I wasn't going to give you any more zucchini recipes but this one is just too delicious to pass up. This is from my Pennsylvania cousin, Mary Ann. She served it fresh out of her abundant garden. Her garden is enclosed with a picket fence and chicken wire to discourage the neighborhood groundhog from feasting on the fruits of her labor.

### Zucchini Gratin

6 tbs. unsalted butter, plus 2 tbs. for topping	1/4 tsp. fresh ground nutmeg
3 large sweet onions, sliced	2 tbs. flour
4 medium size zucchini, sliced 1/4" thick	1 cup milk, heated
2 tsp. sea salt	3/4 cup fresh bread crumbs
1 tsp. fresh ground pepper	3/4 cup grated Gruyere cheese

Preheat oven to 400°. Melt butter in a large sauté pan, add onions and simmer over low heat for about 20 minutes or until tender but not browned. Add the zucchini and cook covered for 10 minutes. Add salt, pepper and nutmeg, cook uncovered for 5 minutes. Stir in the flour. Slowly add the hot milk and cook over low heat for a few minutes until thick. Pour the mixture into an 8 x 10 inch baking dish.

Combine the bread crumbs and grated cheese, sprinkle on top of the zucchini. Dot with 2 tbs. butter cut into small bits. Bake until bubbly and browned, about 20 minutes.

The Waxahachie Downtown Farmers' Market is open every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the south side of the Ellis County Courthouse Square. For information on being a seller call 972-937-7330 ext. 198.

Arlene Hamilton is an Ellis County master gardener and a volunteer with the farmers' market. She can be reached at [a.p.hamilton@att.net](mailto:a.p.hamilton@att.net).



### Don't forget!! Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market!

Saturday, May 31 through the end of October

Hours: 8:00 a.m. thru 1:00 pm.

Visit the Ellis Co. Master Gardener's booth

Free handouts • Help with gardening questions  
2008 Gardening Calendar • Flower and butterfly wheels for sale  
Master Gardener Cookbooks • plus many more items of interest.

**Last day Saturday, October 18th**

## Parsley-Much more than a garnish

*By Lisa Kelly, Ellis County Master Gardener*

Parsley is one of the ten best herbs to grow in Texas, according to Marian Buchanan, and it flourishes in cold weather.

Parsley is in the carrot family. It is one of the oldest and most versatile of our herbs. Chaplets (or wreaths) were worn at Roman and Greek banquets, it is said, to absorb the wine fumes. This was thought to protect the diners from becoming drunk. The Greeks adorned victors with crowns of parsley to show their high esteem. It was held sacred to the dead and adorned the tombs of loved ones. The warriors fed parsley leaves to their chariot horses. Rue and parsley often bordered the Greek gardens.

*Description:* Parsley grows from 12-14" high and 12-16" wide. There are two types to grow in Texas. One, the curly French variety known as *Petroselinum crispum*; this is the type you see at the grocery store and as a garnish in restaurants. It has a beautiful green color. The second is the flat-leaf Italian variety known as *neapolitanum*. It has large, smooth leaves. Some gourmets think this variety has the superior flavor for cooking. It can be cut and added to salads or cooked as a vegetable.

*Uses:* Parsley has very high quantities of vitamin A, B, C, and is a rich source of iron, calcium, magnesium and chlorophyll. Chopped very fine, it enhances many foods such as soups, eggs, potatoes and sauces. It makes an excellent breath freshener and is a must when eating garlic. Parsley cleanses the palate and blends beautifully with other flavors, letting each taste come through. To make chopping easier, rinse with water ahead of time to give it time to dry. Parsley tea makes wonderful skin toner which reduces oiliness. A poultice of leaves are thought to relieve bites and stings of insects. As a companion plant, it may be grown near tomatoes, carrots, roses and asparagus. It is thought to give added vigor and protect against rose beetles. Bees love parsley when in bloom and parsley honey may be the sweetest of all. The swallowtail butterfly prefers parsley to feed its larvae, so plant some extra and just hand remove the larvae to one of your extras. The beautiful green of the curly parsley makes an excellent border for your flower beds.

Growing tips: Parsley is grown as a biennial or annual. Plant it in the fall for best results, as it likes cooler weather.

The Italian type does better in our summers. But give both a try. Shelter it from afternoon sun in the summer and mulch well. If grown from seed, soak in warm water for several hours before you plant. After blooming the plant dies, so pinch off the bloom stems at the crown to prolong growth. Pinch back leaves as needed. This will make a bushier plant. Replant every two years.

## Attracting Birds to Your Garden

*By Melinda Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener*



If you want to attract birds to your garden, these are recommended by Weston Garden, in Fort Worth.

### Bird Attractant Plants:

Abelia	Columbine	Lantana	Flowering Quince
Agarito	Coneflower	Mahonia	Rudbeckia
American Beautyberry	Coralberry	Mexican Mint Marigold	Turk's Cap
Flame Acanthus	Coreopsis	Dwarf Wax Myrtle	Virginia Creeper
Texas Barberry	Elaeagnus	Nandina	Cranberry Bush Viburnum
Boston Ivy	Holly	Oxeye Daisy	
Butterfly Bush	Honeysuckle	Chinese Photinia	

### Bird Attractant Trees:

Texas Ash	Parsley Hawthorn	Callery Pear	Sumac - Smooth
Carolina Buckthorn	Washington Hawthorn	American Persimmon	• Prairie
Eastern Red Cedar	Bush Honeysuckle	Japanese Persimmon	• Evergreen
Chitalpa	Junipers	Texas Persimmon	• Aromatic
Arizona Cypress	Cherry Laurel	Mexican Plum	Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum
Bald Cypress	Southern Magnolia	Creek Plum	Desert Willow
Roughleaf Dogwood	Wax Myrtle	Possumhaw	Yaupon Holly
Cedar Elm	Red Oak	River Privet	
Hackberry	Bradford Pear	Soapberry	

## WHAT LIVED? WHAT DIED?

October is here and it's time to take stock of your landscaping and figure out what lived and what didn't this last hot dry year. It's not as easy as we might think since some of us have better water delivery systems, i.e. sprinkler systems, drip systems and/or time to hand water. The Master Gardeners of Ellis County have a demonstration bed on I-35 East, right in front of the sub-courthouse that you might want to take a look at. This bed full of green and blooming plants has had no water other than natural rainfall in over three years! Yes, I said in over three years and it is in full sun abutting an asphalt parking lot that throws off heat daily.

What makes it work is a combination of things you can do in your own yard. **First** there was the soil preparation with lots of organic matter (ground leaves, compost, city mulch) tilled into the existing soil (You can dig this into a small bed). The **second** thing was the choice of plants. All the plants were chosen with an eye to making the bed self sufficient after the first year. (Let's face it. **All** new plantings need some extra TLC in the way of regular water and fertilizer the first year.) Desert Willow, Crape Myrtles, Sage, Yucca, Nandinas, Sedum, Rosemary, Pampas Grass, Mexican Petunia, and Lantana are what you will find growing their hearts out. **Last**, but not least, was the mulch. A layer of wet newspaper about 8 sheets thick was put over all the bare ground and then quickly covered with three full inches of coarse mulch; fine or shredded mulch tends to compact and shed the rain!

Watered daily for five days after the initial dousing at planting and then weekly for a month seemed to do the trick. Of course if things got droopy that first year in the hot summer months, out came the water hose. The bed was dug and planted in the end of March, one of the better times to get things started. It could have been done in the fall as soon as the nights cooled off to **less than 70 degrees**. Think about what you want your yard and beds to look like. Now is a good time to evaluate, prepare the soil and choose some plants that will survive another dry winter and a hot summer.

Hope your vegetable garden is holding up! My Salad rows are coming on and they will be able to stand the cool nights even if we get a light freeze! Root vegetables and leafy greens can still go into organic amended soils and they will hold up well. I don't have the space but if you do, go for it!

This is the month to start covering any left over poinsettia so that it gets 14 hours of darkness per day. Only do this if you want it to bloom at Christmas! As for me, I think I'll buy mine! I am working on my wish list for Christmas though. Be sure to start looking now for those fun things for gardeners!

### Featured Texas Wildflower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### Texas Wildflowers



**Gayfeather, Blazingstar**  
*Liatris spp.* Sunflower family,  
(Asteraceae)

Zones: 1 through 10  
Size: 1 to 3 1/2 ft.  
Blooms: August-October  
Perennial

Across Texas, one species or another of *Liatris* will be seen along roadsides in gravelly, sandy, or calcareous soils, on plains, prairies, edges, hillsides, slopes and roadsides. This stiffly upright plants grow from a corm (an underground bulb-like stem) which may produce a few to many stalks forming a clump. There are no petals, but four to eight disk flowers form flower heads that cluster densely, opening from the top of a terminal spike downward. The spikes may be twelve inches in length. Leaves are mostly narrow, and in some species are six inches long near the stem's base. They are crowded and spiral up the stem, becoming progressively smaller until they are small bracts in the flowering spike. *Liatris* has had many medicinal uses; as a diuretic, as a mild kidney or liver tonic, and even as a clinical test for kidney function. A root tea has been used for laryngitis.

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**Cedar Ridge Preserve** - 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas, 75229. Please go to the website for an entire list of their activities. [www.audubondallas.org/cedaridge.html](http://www.audubondallas.org/cedaridge.html). They have so much going on; too much to write about. However, their October activities include:

- October 2, Fall Migrant Bird Census continues - Dr. Marcy Brown Marsden
- October 4, Beginning Bird Watching Field Trip - Dr. Marcy Brown Marsden
- October 11, Woodpeckers in the Wild Workshop - Steve Shunk
- October 18, Conservation in Action workday
- October 18-19, The new Trinity River Audubon Center (TRAC) opens this month

### Lighthouse for Learning

(with the Ellis County Master Gardeners)

For reservations, call Melissa Cobb, 972-923-4631

**Thursday, Oct. 2, 6:00-7:30 - Iris** (official flower of Waxahachie). Learn origin, early uses and a media presentation. Plus take home a rhizome to plant in your yard. Instructors: DeAnn Bell and David Smith; Cost: \$10.00

**Monday, Oct. 6, 6:00-7:30 - Rainwater Harvesting.** Learn basics of rainwater harvesting, collection systems and materials needed, landscaping and gardening with rainwater in mind. Instructor Pam Daniel; Cost: \$10.00.

**Thursday, October 9, 6-8:00. In a "Jam"** - Learn the art of canning. If you have canned before but would like to brush up on your skills, join us and have fun learning the steps to can fruits and vegetables. You will make strawberry jam in class. Instructor: Kim Ellis; Cost: \$10.00+\$10.00 supply fee paid to instructor.

**Monday, October 20, 6:00-7:30. Native Plants.** Learn what plants are native and how easy these plants adapt to your garden. Learn why and how these plants can enhance your garden. Instructor: Bill Abbott; Cost: \$10.00

**Monday, October 20, 6:00-7:30. Azaleas.** Learn easy ways to have azaleas in your flower beds. Learn how to grow and enjoy the blooms of early spring and again in the fall. Instructor: Sandra Jones; cost: \$10.00

**Monday, October 27, 6:00-7:30. Planning, Planting, Pruning and Protecting Trees.** Learn the best trees for our area and their appropriate placement in the residential landscape. Experience planting and pruning demonstrations as well as methods for maintaining disease-free, healthy trees. Instructors have recently completed Citizen Forester training provided by the Fort Worth Parks Department. Instructors: Betty Reuscher and Linda Moxley; Cost: \$10.00.

**Mondays Sept. 22 - Oct. 13 (4 classes), 6-8:00. "Ag 101" - Designed for New and Small Acreage Landowners - Session A.** Join this experienced instructor as you cover topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management. Instructor: Mark Arnold, Ellis County Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources; Cost \$20.00.

**Mondays October 20 - November 10 (4 classes), 6:00-8:00. "Ag 101" - Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners - Session B.** Ag 101 is also offered in late October. Students may choose either session A or session B. Instructor, time and cost is the same as above.

Let no one think that real gardening is a bucolic and meditative occupation. It is an insatiable passion, like everything else, to which a man gives his heart.

~Karle • apek, *The Gardener's Year*, translated by M. and R. Weatherall, 1932

One of the most delightful things about a garden is the anticipation it provides.

~W.E. Johns, *The Passing Show*

Earth is here so kind, that just tickle her with a hoe and she laughs with a harvest.

~Douglas William Jerrold, about Australia, *A Land of Plenty*



## Let's Bring Back the Bluebird!

By Jean Wammack, Ellis County Master Gardener

The cold front will bring in the songbirds. We hope you will provide water, food and shelter for the birds. Everyone can enjoy this activity!

If you live on acreage, you might be able to attract nesting songbirds.

Our special interest is the bluebird. This tiny, shy member of the thrush family was once common in Ellis County. But, it lost its habitat as land was developed and farmers changed from old wooden fence posts, which were ideal for bluebird roosting, to metal posts.

We need to put out nesting boxes (bird houses) to provide safe nesting habitat for the bluebird. Mating pairs of bluebirds are looking for nesting sites from February to mid-March and will readily accept man-made boxes.



Boxes should be placed near an open field about 3 to 5 feet above the ground. It is most important that the box face a tree within 50 feet. This tree will provide a perch for young birds to land on as they begin to fly. Boxes should be placed 50 to 100 feet apart. We place most of our boxes on steel fence posts, as ants don't seem to invade the boxes as they might if hung on trees.

Remember to place boxes well away from buildings or deep shade. It is helpful if water is in the area. The blue birds diet is insects and their favorite food is **GRASSHOPPERS!**

The male and female bluebird will build the nest and female starts to lay eggs; generally 5. She will incubate for 12-14 days. After they hatch, the hatchlings are fed in the nest for 2 weeks. When the young birds fledge, or leave the box, clean the old nest and make sure it is dry and ant-free by lifting it up and scraping out the debris that has collected in the bottom of the box, then replace the nest. A lot of energy goes into nest building, so the birds will be happy to re-use one.

Hopefully the pair will soon start a second clutch, and perhaps a third. With each clutch the number of eggs are smaller.

If you see a pair of bluebirds at your birdbath or on the fence, run and buy a nesting box! Just be sure to get a box that opens from the side or front for easy cleaning.

You've never seen a bluebird? The Ellis County Birdwatchers have placed some 10 boxes along the walking trail in Waxahachie! Roy Burks made the boxes and Wendell Stiles helped to place them. The boxes could attract wrens, chickadees or titmouse too.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin. The Texas A & M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.



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

By Mindy Phillips, Ellis County Master Gardener

October is when we begin to believe that fall is possible and summer is really past. Cooler night temperatures and beautiful days are the norm for this month. This is the last month to enjoy colorful summer container plants.

Our first freeze date in Ellis County is around mid-November. Of course, this is Texas and it has been recorded earlier and much later, so listen to the weather forecasts carefully beginning in early November. The first killing frost will kill annual plants and send perennials, trees and shrubs into dormancy. Once the freeze has occurred, it is too late to bring your container plants into the garage. So get them ready before November springs a surprise on you.

You need to accustom your container plants to having less light indoors by moving them into shadier outdoor places in October. Then when you bring them into the garage for the winter they will not have such a drastic adjustment.

Before bringing every pot indoors, be selective to which ones are worth protecting over the winter. Select those container plants that you especially enjoy as those that are the most expensive to replace. Annuals and less expensive plants should be considered expendable. Throw them into the compost pile without regrets once they are frozen back. Big containers of expensive plants, however, are worth keeping alive for next year. I have successfully over-wintered large containers of hibiscus, bougainvillea, jasmine, caladium bulbs, begonias, and ferns in the garage. A sunny window or a grow light is needed for plants to get enough sunlight to survive inside all winter. Watering needs to be reduced but not eliminated during this time inside.

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About now you may be seeing spring bulbs for sale in your nursery. Daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, and more unusual spring flowering bulbs become available in the fall. Careful selection and adequate chilling time will ensure a great show of early spring blooms for you.

Spring bulbs are native to much colder climates than Ellis County. We have to pick varieties that have shown repeat bloom capability over the years and then fool them into thinking they had more winter chilling that they really could have gotten in the ground.

Selecting bulbs that have been shown to bloom over several years is a good idea. Some daffodil varieties to look for are Ice Follies, Mount Hood, King Alfred, Sweeties, campernelles, and most small bloom jonquils. Ask your nursery what varieties they recommend. Tulips, for most of us, are annuals. Grape hyacinths will return much more reliably.

After selecting varieties carefully, you will need to put at least the tulip bulbs into the hydrator drawer of the refrigerator for 3-6 weeks to fool them into thinking they had a winter in the ground. Do not put them in storage with fruit. Some experts insist daffodils need chilling, some don't, so it is your choice. Daffodil bulbs can be planted as early as October without chilling. Tulips should be planted by late December.

When planting spring flowering bulbs, it helps to put bulb booster, bone meal or any good fertilizer into the hole with the bulbs. Mix the fertilizer and the soil together well before planting the bulb. Water well and wait for the colorful blooms to greet you one cold day next Spring.

October is a good time to think about cool weather annuals to plant in your winter flowerbeds. Many plants will happily bloom for you until warm weather next spring. Pansies, snapdragons, ornamental kale and cabbages and dianthus or pinks and others are available now to plant. Their needs are minimal. Plant as directed on their plant tags, fertilize the bed as you plant, and remember to water weekly if we don't get at least a half-inch of rain. Taking off the dead blooms – called deadheading – will encourage your flowering plants to keep flowering. Keeping beds mulched is also a good idea to protect plants from temperature fluctuations and freezing roots.

Deciduous shrubs are another focal point for winter gardens. Their leaves are gone but they have beautiful bark and branch structure to enjoy. Crepe myrtles have peeling bark and graceful trunks that are much more visible when the leaves and blooms are not on the plant. Ornamental grasses have seed heads that look like blooms. Pampas grass, miscanthus, and others are beautiful to watch in winter as they blow in the wind. They provide structure and color to the winter garden until they are given their February haircut. And by then you have some other early bloomers to keep your interest. Possum haw holly is another deciduous shrub that has lovely branches to see all winter. Plant these against a backdrop where the branches will be highlighted – perhaps a plain wall or wooden fence.

Evergreens really take center stage after the fall freeze. Shrubs and trees that keep their leaves all year are the only green to see in the winter. Evergreens include hollies, wax myrtle, live oak, and pines. Remember these plants continue to need water during the winter so give them a drink every couple of weeks if rainfall is not adequate.

The end of October is a great time to check out the required maintenance for your garden tools and equipment before winter cold sets in. You will be glad you took the time now when freezing weather hits and you would rather be inside!

Garden tools require at least semi-annual cleaning, sharpening, and general maintenance. Shovels work better when the blades are sharp. Rakes with loose handles are a pain to use and can be dangerous. Hedge trimmers and pruners need blades sharpened and a quick squirt of lubricant now. You will still probably be using tools until December with various gardening tasks yet to do, but a well-maintained tool is always more fun to use. Thinking about how you organize (or in my case don't organize) your tools and equipment may inspire you to get storage built into your garage or storage shed this winter, thus making next spring's gardening more efficient. Sorting through old seed packets, tomato cages, and other equipment may create some space you didn't know you even had!

Another good October task is cleaning up the pots you have emptied by throwing out the annuals. The pots should be scrubbed in a solution of bleach and water – one part bleach to 10 parts water should do. Remember to protect your eyes from splashes. You may prefer to wear gloves, too. The bleach kills any fungus, insects or bacteria that you don't want overwintering in your garage waiting to victimize next year's plants. When spring comes again you will be ready to put those new annuals and flowers into clean pots for another year of enjoyment.

Remember to order seed catalogs soon. Armchair gardening is a great occupation during the coldest weeks of the winter.

If you would like to learn more, check out our web site [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) or call the Ellis County Agrilife office and speak with a Master Gardener at 972 825 5175. Happy gardening!