



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume I, Issue 7

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

August, 2007

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **Ellis-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. Go to our website: www.ECMGA.com to read it online or click "subscribe" to receive it via email. Thank you.
Melinda Kocian, editor

What's Happening in August

Saturday, August 11, 1:30 and Sunday, August 12 at 1:00 p.m. - **Weston Gardens, Ft. Worth; *Sail Away to the Tropics*.** Event is by RSVP only. It is \$10 per person, pre-paid, non refundable. Each participant will receive a voucher for \$10 for any purchase that weekend. It is a cruise aboard our "Old Ironstones", which is our landlocked stone ship from the 1940's, to celebrate the beauty of the hibiscus. We'll sample hibiscus tea as well as various other flavorful iced teas. Teas will be accompanied by home-made hibiscus infused cookies/sweets. We will teach you to make a perfect pitcher of tea, as well as learning about the hibiscus plants themselves. Many hibiscus will be for sale, and special sales will be announced at this event. Seating is limited and will be reserved on a first come, first served basis. Please RSVP by calling at 817-572-0549.

Saturday, August 11, 9:00 a.m. - **The Greenery; *History of Herbal Tea*** - Mary Nell is the past Chairperson of Herb Society of the North and Central Unit. She is a Collin County Master Gardener. She has done programs across the Metroplex and currently teaches The SAIL program at Collin County Colleges. She is a passionate gardener with much knowledge in the field of herbs.

Tuesday, August 14, 7:00 p.m. - **The Greenery; *Landscaping a Butterfly Garden*** - Marilyn Simmons and Judie Miller will be presenting a video of preparing Judie's hill-side butterfly garden and then we will drive a short distance to her garden to see it; hopefully, aflutter with butterflies.

Cedar Hill State Park, for more info, please call **972-291-3900, Ext. 232**

Friday, August 3, 7-8 pm - Bats - Friend or Foe?

Saturday, August 4, 3-4 pm - Mammals-Our Fuzzy, Furry Friends

Saturday, August 4, 9-10 am - Pond Trail Nature Walk

Saturday, August 11, 3-4 pm - Reptiles-Our Scaly Skinned Friends

Saturday, August 11 7:00 pm - Top 10 Park Secrets

Special Event!

Friday, August 24, 9:00 pm - 3rd in a series—Summer Moonlight Movies in Downtown Waxahachie, "***Ferris Bueller's Day Off***". An evening Farmers Market will run in conjunction with the movies. Vendors will be set up at 7:30 pm for people to come shop for plants, fruits and vegetables. Many downtown merchants are also extending their store hours to accommodate moviegoers. "Bring your blankets and lawn chairs and come downtown for a night of family fun." Bring your own food and drinks or buy from the vendors. The movie will be projected on the East wall of the Plaid Donkey (formerly the Blair Bldg.). Don't forget: **It's FREE!**

Come Visit....

The Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market

The Waxahachie Downtown Association, in conjunction with an information booth manned by Master Gardeners, runs a Farmer's Market every Saturday morning from 8:00 until 1:00 p.m. now through October 20th.

The Farmer's Market is a wonderful place to pick up fresh flowers, home-grown fruits and vegetables from our local farmers, Master Gardeners on hand to answer your horticulture questions, cold fruit smoothies and much, much more.

Plus....it's a wonderful place to meet friends and neighbors, around the historic square. It's a hubbub of activity every Saturday. So **COME ON DOWN!**

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Perennials: Cut back or not?

By Hillary Gant

Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

What to do between seasons, if anything at all, varies widely

Leave coneflowers' seed heads intact for winter birds. The advantage of planting perennials is that they come back year after year, saving expense and work. But what do you do between growing seasons, how do you cut back the dead and withered foliage, and should all perennials be cut back in the same way? These questions paralyze all but the most knowledgeable gardeners.



All plants come equipped with mechanisms for shedding dead foliage when the new growth pushes through in the spring. The problem is they don't clean themselves as neatly or as soon as we might like. Cutting back the dead or withered foliage helps tidy the garden and prepare for next season.

When do I cut back?

When you cut back depends partly on your plants' needs and partly on your sense of aesthetics. Late fall has been the traditional time to cut back perennials, but many experts now advise letting most perennials stand through the winter to take advantage of the last stage in their life cycles.

Some perennials, as their hybridizers intended, add interest to the winter garden. Ornamental grasses, for instance, add height when most plants are short during this period, such as pansies and kales. Evergreen perennials add a bit of needed green to the brown landscape during the winter months. Plus the dried stems, leaves and flowers provide food, cover and shelter for songbirds. Goldfinches devour the seeds of purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), and native sparrows and finches love the seeds of black-eyed Susan's (*Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm') and joe pye weed (*Eupatorium*). The dead stems offer shelter during winter and nest-building materials in spring.

Self-sowing perennials, including columbine (*Aquilegia*), Lenten rose (*Helleborus*), four o'clocks (*Mirabilis jalapa*) and fall aster (*Aster oblongifolia*), will multiply if left alone over winter. The baby seedlings germinate in fall and put down roots in winter.

One of the best reasons to leave withered stubs and foliage on your perennials is to help you remember where you planted what. You don't want to accidentally cut a plant in two with a spade or plant something on top of another plant. This is especially important for perennials that are slow to emerge in the spring, such as perennial hibiscus (*H. moscheutos*), balloon flower (*Platycodon grandiflorus*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*) and blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*).

Some perennials actually over-winter better when most or all the dead stems are intact. This is true for lantana, rock rose (*Pavonia lasiopetala*) and Mexican heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*). Leaves caught in the stems of the plant help insulate the crown, and the stems store starches, which increase survival during extended freezes. Leaving stems on tender perennials, those on the edge of their hardiness zone or those planted in unprotected areas of the garden also helps to protect the crowns through winter.

What type of perennial is it?

Butterfly weed should be cut back to short stubs to help you remember where it is planted. Before rushing into the garden with hand pruners, first you must know what types of perennials are growing in your garden. Perennials fall into one of four types: herbaceous, semi-evergreen, evergreen and woody. Leslie Finical Halleck, general manager of North Haven Gardens, says gardeners get confused about which perennials to cut back when. "Each type of perennial has a different pruning method and time period for cutting back," she says. The first step, therefore, is to identify the type of perennial you're eyeing, secateurs in hand. Remember, plants don't read garden books that tell us whether a plant is evergreen or herbaceous. If columbine, for instance, is evergreen in your garden south of LBJ Freeway, it might not be evergreen north of State Highway 121. When plants behave differently, gardeners need to treat them accordingly.



If in doubt, observe your plants after the first freeze to see if they wither and die to the ground, and look at the interior of your plants to see if they have any woody stems. No rule book can substitute your own observations in your garden. To a large extent your plants will tell you when they need cutting back.

Herbaceous plants



Peony: True herbaceous perennials die to the ground each fall after a killing freeze and return from the roots next spring. These can be cut back any time after a freeze; just wait until the plants are really dormant. If there is a question, scratch the stem to see if it is still green underneath. If it is, wait a little longer. Cut back the dead foliage to just above the ground and compost it. Don't compost any foliage that had insect problems or disease.

At the Dallas Arboretum, herbaceous perennials get cut back around the first of the year, according to director of horticulture research Jimmy Turner. "We wait until a few freezes have come and gone and then a few weeks after that," Mr. Turner says. "Some perennials turn black and slippery after a freeze. Waiting a few weeks lets the foliage dry and loosen, and then it's easier to just rake or pull up."

Sedum: Plants in this group include hosta, perennial sunflower (*Heliopsis x multiflorus*), peony (*Paeonia officinalis*), tall Mexican petunia (*Ruellia brittoniana*), different garden sages (*Salvia* species), tall garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), tall sedums, zexmenia (*Zexmenia hispidula*), Mexican mint marigold (*Tagetes lucida*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and spiderwort (*Tradescantia*).



Semi-evergreens



Coreopsis: Semi-evergreen perennials die back to a low clump of leaves near the ground known as a rosette, from which new green stems emerge in spring. These perennials can be safely cut back after a freeze, when the tall stems have browned and withered. Be careful not to cut into the rosette; just remove as much

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as possible of the tall stems above it.

To prevent accidentally jerking the plant out of the ground, hold the rosette with one hand while using a hand pruner or snapping the stems off with your other hand. For plants with a less-defined rosette, such as Shasta daisy, which stays evergreen at the base but keeps spreading out in a loose slouch, cut stems about three inches above the ground. This ensures you do not damage the crown of the plant.

Pincushion flower. Plants in this group include Shasta daisies (*Leucanthemum x superbum*), yarrow (*Achillea*), pincushion flower (*Scabiosa columbaria*), perennial bachelor's buttons (*Centaurea montana*), coralbells (*Heuchera*), foam flower (*Tiarella*), garden mums (*Chrysanthemum*), gaura (*Gaura lindheimeri*), coreopsis, black-eyed susan, day lily (*Hemerocallis*), *Salvia nemorosa*, purple cone-flower (*Echinacea purpurea*), phlox, dianthus, tall speedwell (*Veronica*), blanket flower (*Gaillardia x grandiflora*), obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), penstemon and verbasicum.



Evergreens

Winecup. Evergreen perennials, as their name implies, stay green throughout the year, although individual leaves may die or be damaged and brown. As a general rule, these perennials should not be cut back during the dormant season except to remove dead foliage or broken stems. Some of these plants, like Artemisia, can be damaged or even killed if cut back severely. These plants should be cut back



only after they bloom. Even then, don't cut back to the ground. Remove dead flowers, leaves and stems to tidy the plants. To control size, cut back by half or less soon after they bloom.

Lamb's ear. Plants in this group include artemisia, lavender, rosemary, pink skullcap (*Scutellaria suffrutescens*), lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*), groundcover types of sedum, columbine (*Aquilegia* sp.), winecups (*Callirhoe involucreta*), hardy iceplant (*Delosperma cooperi*), Texas betony (*Stachys coccinea*), purple heart (*Setcreasea pallida*), thyme and evergreen sage (*Salvia officinalis* 'Berggarten'), candytuft (*Iberis sempervirens*), ajuga, evergreen euphorbia, Lenten rose (*Helleborus*), perennial verbena, german-der (*Teucrium chamaedrys*), and Mexican oregano (*Poliomentha longiflora*).



Woodies

Woody perennials, also called sub-shrubs, is another group of perennials that survive the winter best if left standing. Woody perennials should be trimmed during the growing season so they

can be left alone and look good all winter. When new growth appears along the stems in spring, it is safe to cut back to new growth or trim for shape and size. Use sharp hand pruners to cut into the woody structure of the plant to remove any dead or damaged stems. If new growth appears only at the base of the plant, then the entire top woody portion of the plant has died, and you can cut back to where new growth appears or about six inches above the ground.

This group of perennials or sub-shrubs can confuse gardeners. Leslie Halleck says woodies can be damaged or even killed by cutting back to the ground at the wrong time of year. "We don't want to interrupt their bloom cycle," she says.

Cuphea. Gardeners sometimes confuse flowering shrubs with these woody perennials. Some flowering shrubs like hydrangeas and snowball viburnum (*Viburnum macrocephalum*) bloom on old wood and should only be pruned after they bloom. If you didn't prune them last spring or summer, leave them alone for now to preserve this year's flowers.



Woody perennials include autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*), Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), blue beard (*Caryopteris*), cigar plant (*Cuphea micropetala*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*), flame anisacanthus (*Anisacanthus quadrifidus* v. *wrightii*), butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) and santolina.

Ornamental grasses



Dwarf fountain grass. Ornamental grasses can be cut back any time throughout winter. North Haven's Leslie Halleck says she cuts back ornamental grasses in mid-February before any new growth shows. "Plants should be cut as close to the ground as possible using whatever can cut through the grass, even a chainsaw for those tough, large clumps."

Cut back liriop (*Liriope muscari*) in mid-February also. The same rules apply: Cut as close to the ground as possible and don't wait too long, or you will cut the new growth off. If you have a lot of liriop, a lawn mower is a quick method of cutting back.

Once perennials are cut back, the beds are as empty as they'll ever be, and it's easier to move around in them. Use this opportunity to remove weeds and to top-dress with compost and add a layer of mulch.

You can always cut more, but you can't glue it back on. If you are unsure what to do, don't cut. The arboretum's Mr. Turner says, "If you haven't gotten around to it, when spring comes it will be obvious where you need to cut the dead foliage off."

(For more information, a good reference is Tracy DiSabato-Aust's *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting and Pruning Techniques* (2006, Timber Press).

Listen to KBEC.....

Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m.

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!

2008 Master Gardener Calendar

Planning is underway for our 2nd annual Ellis County Master Gardener calendar. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, please contact James Kocian at 972-814-0699

Don't miss out, sponsorship is limited. The 2007 calendar was a huge success in 2007 and the 2008 issue will be even better!

It's August - What Needs to be Done?

Planting and Sowing

- Sow seeds of snapdragons, dianthus, pansies, calendulas and other seasonal cut flowers in flats for planting outside during mid- to late fall.
- Plant bluebonnets and other spring wildflowers. They must germinate in late summer or early fall, develop good root systems, and be ready to grow in spring when the weather warms. Plant seed in well-prepared, weed- and grass-free soil, 1/2 inch deep, and water thoroughly.
- Sow fall beans, squash, corn and cucumbers early this month.
- Set transplants of fall cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts mid- to late month.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- A late-summer pruning of rose bushes can be beneficial. Prune out dead canes and any weak, brushy type of growth. Cut back tall, vigorous bushes to about 30 inches. After pruning, apply a complete fertilizer and water thoroughly. If a preventive disease-control pro-

gram has been maintained, your rose bushes should be ready to provide an excellent crop of flowers this fall.

This and That

- Make selections and place your order for spring-flowering bulbs, to arrive in time for planting in October and November.
- Establish a new compost pile to accommodate the fall leaf accumulation.

Garden Watch

- Follow the "Homeowner's Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule" to protect pecan trees against pecan weevils and hickory shuck worms.
- Refer to same schedule to protect peach and plum trees from peach tree borers.

Tip of the Month

Soil analysis will determine whether soil improvement is needed for better water absorption and improved water-holding capacity.



Featured Plant for August

Lantana (Native) *Lantana horrida* spp.

Perennial bedding plant with bushy growth and many small flowers. Most varieties return every year. Easy to grow in well drained soil, drought tolerant and regular fertilization will produce more blooms. Attracts butterflies, hummingbirds, and birds eat ripe fruit.

Exposure: Sun to Part Shade, Size: Ht 3-6' Spread 4-5', Bloom Time: Spring till Frost

Stacking the Deck

By Maureen Nitkowski, Ellis County Master Gardener

With summer in Texas there comes a lull in planting and even visiting the garden. Like his plants, the gardener is in "survival mode" and expending little energy beyond the necessary watering and searches for invading pests or diseases. The optimism of spring is gone and self-blame can creep in regarding those plantings which haven't done as well as was hoped. Take heart from my Grandmother's rose garden.

My Grandmother had about fifty rose bushes growing in the yard with few duplicates. Each spring compost was added to the beds as well as handfuls of coffee grounds and banana peels. Insects were removed by hand (a good job for grandchildren), and dusts were used sparingly. Her newest addition was a Peace rose which did well but not spectacularly. One day while getting ready to mow the lawn, my Mom forgot about the glass gallon bottle of gasoline on the step next to the Peace rose. As she opened the door quickly in a wide arc the bottle was broken and the gasoline flowed onto the rose bush. For the rest of the year a dismal cluster of dead canes with only one sporting a few leaves remained. The next year following its spring pruning the Peace rose put out new growth like never before. By June it was more than 4 feet tall and wide, and had huge blooms on healthy stems with leaves. It remained a vigorous plant for many years afterwards.

For me the moral of the story is that plants can and often do survive the worst treatment we inflict on them. Conversely, some plants insist on dying or remain puny regardless of all the right things we've done. The best we can do is to stack the deck by knowing the climate, soil conditions, native plants, and tested winners for our gardens. Keep in mind though; we are not the only dealer in the game.

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.



FALL GARDENING

By Jackie Wilhite, Ellis County Master Gardener



Thinking of trying a fall garden this year? The heavy June rains did some damage to some plants. While the roses and crape myrtles suffered their black spot and powdery mildew, plants in the vegetable garden suffered from spider mites, blights, rust and other fungal diseases.

July is the time to begin planting the fall garden. Start with a minimum amount of soil preparation by tilling some compost or mulch lightly into the soil. It's too hot to spend a lot of time tilling soil. (Early in the morning or late in the evenings is the best time for the gardener's sake) If you will be planting tomato or pepper seed, start the seeds the first week of July so they can get about 4 weeks growth to develop a good root system by the time to transplant around the end of July or the first week of August. Cutting back existing tomato or pepper plants and adding some additional mulch and fertilizer to encourage new growth is also an option for a fall harvest. This works for some varieties unless the plant has been plagued with spider mites or fungal diseases. In this case, starting with new plants is optimum. Otherwise, it's a personal choice.

Some vegetables planted in the fall have a better flavor because shorter days seem to concentrate the sugars in crops such as corn and beans. Some Texas growing conditions are better in the fall, (warm soil, cool nights, and days without extreme heat.)

Other fall crops that can be planted up into the first part of August include lima beans, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Swiss chard, cucumbers, parsley, and summer squash.

To get additional information on any of these vegetables, please call a volunteer Master Gardener at the Ellis County Extension Office at 972.825.5175.

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Compost – Nature's Perfect Food

By Jamey Guarascio-Cosper, Ellis County Master Gardener



Compost – the new buzzword around the gardening circle and for good reason. Compost transforms unplanted areas into vital, healthy plots; creates drainage where none previously existed; and supercharges average bloomers into award winning specimens worthy of photos and arboretums. Unlike all the pricey supplements you find advertised in the back of garden magazines, compost can be made at home easily and for free.

Compost is what happens when organic matter dies and breaks down. When leaves, grass clippings, veggie and fruit scraps, coffee grounds and filters, used tea bags and dryer lint decompose, they become "super food" for other plants – full of the nutrients plants need. Not only do the plants obtain nourishment, but compost also improves the quality of the soil, the texture of the soil, and the soils ability to retain and utilize water.

Basics

There are two rules of thumb to keep in mind:

- 1) To breakdown most efficiently, a pile needs to be a minimum of 3' x 3' x 3', and
- 2) Use the same amount by weight of "green" materials as "brown" materials. Rule of thumb – green items stink when they decompose (veggie and fruit scraps, manure, green grass clippings, etc.) and brown will burn as they decompose (dead leaves, dry hay, wood shavings, shredded paper, etc.).

Moisture is essential to a healthy compost pile – your pile should feel like a damp sponge at all times.

Don't compost meat, bones, fish, dairy products, grease and oil, pet droppings from carnivorous animals, weeds with seed runners, diseased and insect-infested plants, or shavings and sawdust from treated wood.

Easy Compost Recipe

Select an area that measures 4' by 8'; where water does not puddle when it rains. Place the bin or pile on half of this space, mixing brown and green materials in equal parts by weight. Water the pile as you build it to keep it thoroughly moist. Build the pile to a height of 3' to speed up composting process. Mix greens and browns as you add to the pile – if adding kitchen scraps, bury them 10 inches or so into the pile to avoid attracting pests. Turn the pile over with a hay fork or shovel every two to three weeks; add water as needed.

Finished compost can be sifted out and used when the materials break down and smell like rich soil. You can use it as top dressing around plants, as a planting supplement in houseplants, in your flower and veggie beds, around the drip line of trees to vitalize them, an inch or two thick under newly planted sod to help it establish quicker, etc.

Happy Composting!

Control of Diseases in the Home Lawn

by Jim Tachias, Ellis County Master Gardener



As the hot summer is coming up fast our lawns are subject to diseases that can damage our home lawns. Damage can be prevented or reduced with minimum effect when the home owner uses information available. Identification of the disease giving your lawn problems is essential for control. Some turf diseases have symptoms that can be readily identified.

Brown Patch

A fungus disease that gives more problems in the fall, but can occur in the spring. Brown patch is characterized by circular patches of yellow and/or brown grass that can vary from one foot to several feet in diameter. The outside of the circle can have a "smoke ring" appearance caused by the spreading fungus. Grass in the center of the ring may recover within weeks giving the diseased area a doughnut-shaped appearance. Fungus is most active when humidity is high and night temperatures dip to 70 or below and daytime temperatures are between 75 and 90 degrees.

St. Augustine grass is affected more often but it can occur in Bermuda grass or Zoysia grass. Brown patch will cause the grass to be easily pulled from the stem.

Prevention can include watering during the morning hours, proper fertilization and the use of preventive fungicides in the early fall such as Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide, Prostar, Maneb Plus and others. Be sure to read label and follow instructions on all fungicides.

Take-All Patch

A serious fungus disease of St. Augustine and Bermuda grass. This disease has symptoms that are similar to those of brown patch. The first symptom is often a yellowing of the leaves which may die and turn brown. The area of infection may be circular or irregular in shape and at least 20 feet in diameter. Unlike brown patch, the leaves of take-all infected plants do not easily separate from the plant when pulled. The roots are sometimes so rotted that the damaged roots are easily pulled from the ground.

Controlling take-all patch is not easy. Good drainage is important as are proper watering and lawn management. The disease can survive on infested thatch so that the prevention of thatch buildup is recommended. If possible adjust the soil ph in the upper root zone so that it is slightly acidic, preferably in a range of ph 6.0 to 6.5. Fall application of fungicides such as Heritages, Patchwork, or Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide can help prevent the disease. Be sure to read the label and follow instructions on all fungicides.

Leaf Spot Disease

Various leaf spot diseases cause considerable damage to St. Augustine grass as well as Bermuda grass lawns. These diseases may first appear as isolated dark or light spots on leaf blades which enlarge or merge to form dark blotches on leaves and stems. Infected leaves may die and turn brown. In areas of heavy disease development, the grass may have a yellow, burned, or scorched appearance. Where these diseases exist necessary watering should be done during the a.m., nitrogen temporarily withheld, and fungicides such as Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide, Heritage, Daconil or Compass used to prevent further infestation.

Fungicides should be used in combination with good management practices to prevent and treat diseases. No one chemical can or will prevent or control every disease. Correct diagnosis is critical to proper chemical selection. Chemicals must always be used and applied according to label recommendations. After you have the correct diagnosis, read the selected chemical label to see if it is recommended by the manufacturer to be effective for the control of the particular disease in your yard and apply according to the label.

Chemicals listed in this article are for information purposes only and the mention of the product does not guarantee or warrant the standard of the products, the suitability of that product to treat your particular disease, nor does it imply approval of any product to the exclusion of others which may be equally suitable. To the best of my knowledge the listed chemicals are currently available on the market but products can be withdrawn without prior notice. Check with our extension office at 972-825-5175 for other recommendations if you are unable to find the product you need.

I think the true gardener is a lover of his flowers, not a critic of them. I think the true gardener is the reverent servant of Nature, not her truculent, wife-beating master. I think the true gardener, the older he grows, should more and more develop a humble, grateful and uncertain spirit.

~Reginald Farrer, In a Yorkshire Garden, 1909

Bald Cypress

By James Guarascio-Cosper



Bald Cypress, *Taxodium distichum*, is a deciduous conifer that offers homeowners a majestic tree with a fine textured appearance. Reaching heights of 70 to 150 feet and 30 feet wide, the Bald Cypress is pyramidal in habit, features distinctly horizontal branches, and boasts a heavy straight trunk. The Bald Cypress is very long-lived (have been documented at 1,200 years old) and strong – often surviving hurricane strength winds. This magnificent tree thrives in Zones 4 – 9, yet has been successfully grown as far north as Minnesota and southern Canada.



Called the "wood eternal" because of the heartwood's resistance to decay, Bald Cypress is used for heavy construction, including docks, warehouses, boats, bridges, as well as general millwork and interior trim.

Often thought of as a tree for "wet" soils due to the fact that it is regularly found in swampy sites, the Bald Cypress can also adapt to dry sites and becomes quite drought tolerant once adapted. Also, the Bald Cypress is adaptable to most soil types although it can become chlorotic in high pH soils.

Lighting: The Bald Cypress should be planted in full sun and is quite intolerant of shade when young.

Appearance: The foliage of the Bald Cypress is linear and small, spirally arranged along the stems. Leaves are ¼ to ¾ inch long, and are shed, along with its short branches in the winter -- hence its name. New growth is a very light green turning to a softer but darker green in summer.

Fall color is a rich brown. The Bark is reddish-brown and fibrous, although it may be gray where exposed to the weather; old, thick bark may appear somewhat scaly. The contrast between the foliage and bark make this a great specimen tree. A fluted or buttressed base, often with knees, is most commonly associated with the Bald Cypress.

Germination requires the seed to be in a source of constant moisture, which would explain why the Bald Cypress is so prolific in swampy areas.

Pests and Diseases – Generally speaking, the Bald Cypress is bothered by few pests or disease. Although Globose scale sometimes harasses the Bald Cypress, clustering up and down the twigs in the late Spring. A horticultural oil spray generally eliminates them. Twig blight caused by *Pestalotia funerea* is a weak pathogen and is usually present on dead or dying tissue. When the tree is stressed the fungus can kill branch tips. Control is usually not needed. Dead tips can be pruned off. Do not let dead or diseased branches remain on the tree. Keep trees healthy with regular fertilization.

In sum, the Bald Cypress offers homeowners a nice alternative to the high-maintenance conifers that are often "included in their landscape package" when they purchase a new home. Not only will the Bald Cypress add character to the landscape, it also can offer a solution to a poor drainage area in need of some height.



Upcoming Waxahachie Farmer's Market Events

In July the second Movie Night was held. The animated movie "Over the Hedge" was played and it was really cute. There will be one more movie night on Friday, August 24th. The movie on tap that evening will be "Ferris Bueller's Day Off". It's a lot of fun and if you haven't come out yet, you should try to in August. You can bring your own food and drinks or buy something from one of the vendors.

Domino Tournament - A domino tournament ("42") will be held at the market. Date is still tentative; it will depend on when the person who will judge the tournament is available. The two tentative dates are August 11 or August 18. The city will advertise the tournament in the Daily Light once the date has been firmed up. There will be prizes so come on out if you are a "42" player.

Cotton Festival - This year's Cotton Festival will be held sponsored by the Farmer's Market and held on September 15. The 4H will bring a cotton gin. They will show how to pick the cotton and how to run it through the gin. There will also be spinning and weaving demonstrations. Bring your family out and help celebrate Ellis County's cotton heritage. It will be a great learning opportunity for children or grandchildren.

That's it for now. If you haven't been to the market yet this year, be sure to come on out.

Call for Entries for Ellis County Master Gardener Photography Contest

The Ellis County Master Gardeners challenge photographers from all levels of experience to capture their ideal horticultural image in the inaugural Master Gardener photography contest sponsored by the Ellis County Master Gardeners and The Waxahachie Daily Light.

The deadline for entries is September 30, 2007. Winners will be announced on October 15, 2007. Winners will be recognized on the contest's website www.ecmga.com, in their E-Gardening newsletter, and in the Waxahachie Daily Light newspaper. Images are to be submitted in a digital format as per guidelines found on the contest's website.

The three categories for 2007 are:

- **Single specimen:** i.e., a single tulip, field of bluebonnets, etc.
- **In The Garden:** i.e., water gardens, butterfly gardens, rooftop gardens, full backyards, flower boxes, fairy gardens, container gardens, etc.
- **Garden Bounty:** i.e., herbs, fruits, veggies, bundle of tomatoes, peas fresh on the vine, a spectacular gourd, etc.

Images will be judged by a panel of judges based on technical quality (sharpness & correct exposure), composition, creativity and originality. No identifiable people in the photographs, please.

The official rules and entry form are available online at <http://www.ecmga.com>. For more information on the Ellis County Master Gardeners, visit their website at www.ecmga.com.



The **Ellis County Master Gardeners** invite photographers from all levels of expertise to enter our first ever Photo Contest.

Photo Contest

CATEGORIES:
Single specimen
In the Garden
Garden Bounty

Contest runs
May 1 – September 30, 2007

For a complete copy of the rules and application form, please log on to: **www.ECMGA.com**

Presented by:
Ellis County Master Gardeners and
The Waxahachie Daily Light








Cucumbers

Do you have more cucumbers than you know what to do with? Try these two recipes:

Melinda's Cucumber Spread

8 oz. cream cheese
3 rounded tablespoons mayonnaise
Salt, to taste
Tabasco sauce, to taste

1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
1/4 - 1/3 cup finely minced onion
lemon juice, little at a time, to taste



With a mixer, cream together mayo and cheese until smooth and well blended. Stir in by hand onions, cucumber and lemon juice. Add salt and Tabasco sauce to suit your own taste.

NOTE: It's wonderful served with Ritz-type crackers or as little finger sandwiches, with the crust trimmed, for a cool hot summer lunch or at a baby or bridal shower.

Sliced Cucumbers in Brine

Depending on how many cucumbers you have, pick a bowl accordingly to size. Peel and seed cucumbers, slice thin, and place in the bowl. Add onions (you judge how many), sliced thin, in with the cucumber slices. Generously salt, mixing with your fingers. Let stand for 30 minutes or longer. Rise thoroughly. Fill bowl with water to within an inch of the cucumbers and onions. Add apple cider vinegar to just cover. Mix well. Taste and adjust proportions until you are please with the taste. Add salt again if necessary. Cover and keep refrigerated. YUM!

Succulents and Cactus for Water Wise Gardens

By Jackie Wilhite, Ellis County Master Gardener



For the gardener who doesn't want to spend a lot of time and money watering plants; cactus and succulents are an ideal alternative. Their appearance is both intriguing and unusual.

In harsh dry habitats, these plants endure temperature extremes with scorching days and freezing nights in very poor soil with less than 10 inches of rainfall per year. Some of the species available for the home gardener, however, can thrive in scorching hot sun but will not survive in areas with frost and cold temperatures such as we have in Ellis County.

Using succulents and cactus in the landscape requires careful selection since they are not all cold hardy. The agave or century plant, yuccas, sedum and prickly pear cactus do fine in our climate while aloe, sclumbergera, (a.k.a. Christmas cactus) kalanchoe, lampranthus (ice plants) sansevieria (mother-in-law's tongue) should be grown in containers so they can be brought indoors to protect them during winter months.

The choice of containers for these plants is as great as the plants themselves. Succulents and cacti will grow in hanging baskets, single or multi-planted pottery or clay containers or plastic pots. Take into consideration the growing habit of the plant and the selection of the right container will be easy. Planting a small variety of these plants in the same container provides a small garden in one planter. Potting soil mixed especially for cactus and succulents is available at local garden centers.

While most of us don't want an entire landscape filled with cactus or succulents, (some do) incorporating these plants into one area of the garden or landscape can be very rewarding. These plants don't require a lot of water and will endure dry periods quite well. They are the total opposite of some hanging baskets that need watering 2-3 times a day just to stay alive.

Plants that conserve water will become more popular and readily available as we strive to conserve water. In the near future, we will be challenged more by water shortages. If water conservation practices become second nature to landscape designers and home gardeners then mandatory water guidelines won't be necessary. Conserving natural resources should be everyone's concern.

For information on any water-wise gardening hints, please call a volunteer Master Gardener at the Ellis County Extension Office 972.825.5175.

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.

August is upon us and the heat is finally here. Your plants are really going to feel the intense heat as well as the humidity if you don't have a good layer of mulch on them these next few months. A three to four inch layer of mulch moderates the soil temperature, keeping it cooler in the summer heat and warmer in the cold of our winters. It also helps keep the moisture constant; not too wet or too dry.

Mulching is as natural a method of moisture and weed control as you can get. Think about all those forest floors with their decaying leaves. They put fertilizer back into the areas the trees can use as well as hold down evaporation! All this without fuss and expense!

There are lots of different mulches, but we have the best results with organic mulches, that is the ones that break down to fertilize the plants they protect.

Some of the inorganic mulches are used in some areas: rock, glass, chipped rubber, etc. Please know that even though they will block weeds if applied heavily enough; they return no nutrients to the soil. Their main advantage is that they require very

little in the way of additions to keep them at three inches. Organic mulches decay providing nutrients to the soil and need to be added to about every 6 months to keep a good three to four inches on top of the soil.

Shredded leaves are about the most available and very desirable. All it takes is a big tree dropping its leaves and you running your mower over them with the catcher attached. When applied in a three to four inch layer they will do all the good things like blocking weeds, moderating soil temperature and reducing evaporation and they are free!! Nature has mulched this way for centuries, but shredding them speeds up the decomposition process and negates the matting that happens when whole leaves are used.

Bark mulches are made from the by products of our logging industry. Most common are shredded bark and bark chunks. The shredded does tend to matt and actually shed water whereas the chunks are better. Bark mulches will not blow away and are readily available. Bark mulches from native or local trees give back the nutrients that those trees need.

These are just two of the organic mulches available to us in Texas.

The benefits of a good thick layer of mulch under and around your landscapes plants. It is also a great idea for your garden plants. The stress of too little or too much water can diminish your crop before you know what's happening.

Mulching with straw or other mulches between the rows as well as under your vegetables not only gives your plants a much more consistent temperature and water level, but it provides a dryer place for you to stand to pick all those yummy vegetables! As the straw decomposes it fertilizes the garden and can be turned under to provide more organic matter to the soil at the end of the growing season.

Straw is also used for landscaping although it doesn't please the eye as much as some of the other mulches. It can also contain some weed seeds such as the dreaded John-



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son grass seed. The weeds do pull easily, but there are better choices for your front yards. If you do use straw, make sure it is straw not hay, since hay contains many, many weed seeds.

Cedar chips are a popular kind of mulch in our area. They have been advertised as a natural bug deterrent. I have no problem with cedar chips although many see the cedar tree as essential to our wildlife habitat. I see the cedar tree as a water guzzler and so would like to see a lot of the ones on my property made into chips! Cedar chips do look good and are easy to work with. The larger the chip, the less likely they are to compact and act like a plastic sheet keeping much needed water out.

So far we have talked about shredded leaves, bark mulch, cedar chips, and straw as our organic mulches. These are the ones that decompose and replenish the soil with goods for plant growth. Inorganic mulches cover the ground but do not "go away" or decompose. The rock ones actually hold heat, not a good thing in our 100-degree summers!

With all our rains in July, you may wonder why bother. The addition of organic matter to the soil not only helps in the dry times but it loosens up the soil, that is, conditions it so the heavy rains can seep down and not drown the plants. They can just send their roots down a bit farther when it begins to get hot and dry and find that water waiting for them that would have run off.

Pine needles are yet another good source of mulch. They don't pack down and can provide great acid mulch for those acid loving plants like azaleas, camellias, and gardenias. They are readily available here in our alkaline soils but I bet every one of us has a friend in east or south Texas who throws these away by the bag! Baled pine needles have become more readily available at some of the garden stores, but why by it if you can get it for free?

One of the best sources of mulch according to Texas A&M is your own yard and all the limbs that fall, get blow down or you have to have taken out. These woody limbs make great chips when run through a chipper of large or the handy mower of an inch or so or smaller. If you can get local chips fresh from the tree, they will do a great job on soil temperature and water retention. They will also put back into the soil more

of the exact nutrients that your area needs than any of the commercially advertised mulches. It's my fond wish to grab one of the trucks that is trimming the trees for the electric company and get them to leave me a load of freshly chipped mulch. Of course then I have to fill my wheelbarrow and put it on, but... The old theory of fresh cuttings not being good for your landscape has been debunked by Texas A&M. They are now saying that as long as the fresh mulch is on top of the ground and not in the root zone, there will be no nitrogen draw from the plants. I like it because it decomposes more slowly and I don't have to put it on as often! It stays in place and turns a great gray color. It's large enough that it doesn't compact and allows the rain to tunnel down to the plant roots. This is the ultimate in recycling since it would go in the trash anyway.

We've talked about inorganic and organic mulches. The rock, glass, rubber, etc. are the inorganic ones and will help block weeds as well as help a bit with the soil and water evaporation. The inorganic ones don't do the bang up job that the organic ones do, but they don't have to be refreshed as often either. The organic ones we have spoken about are shredded leaves; bark chips, wood chips, cedar chips, straw, and pine needles.

Those newspapers you read and throw out are yet another source of mulch. They can be put down in layers of 6 to 8 sheets directly on the ground and overlapped to discourage weeds. To keep the paper from blowing, wet it and then weigh it down with a shovel full of soil. Better yet use it wet under three inches of wood chips. It will block the weeds and decompose to add fertilizer to those plants. One word of warning: Use only the regular newsprint portions of the papers. The slick shiny ads shed water rather than allow it to soak through to the plant roots. Shredded newsprint also works well, but does blow around. I would suggest that if you don't use another mulch to top the newspaper, use it only in areas that are not highly visible. It can look unsightly and will dry out quickly if not topped with something.

The grass clippings that your neighbors catch and throw away are yet another great source of ready fertilizer for your landscape. (You don't catch your yard now do you?) Grass clippings can be put on you flower beds and gardens straight from the

catcher of someone else's mower as long as they are put on in 1-inch or less layers a week apart. I put all my neighbors on our streets clippings on my beds for 20 plus years in Houston and had the best looking flowers around. Never did it burn the plants, but I did only put on a light coat of grass clippings each week.

One big temptation is for those of us with access to woodworkers are those big sacks of sawdust that they invariably produce. Sawdust is so very fine that it packs and can actually smother the plant. It cakes and then robs the plants of nitrogen as it sifts down into the root zone. If you have sawdust, put it in your compost pile and add lots of nitrogen. The same goes for ashes from fireplaces or fires. They need the compost pile before the goodies they hide can become available. Being so very fine they will also sift down into the root zone and rob the plants of nutrients.

Please remember that there is no mulch season. You can put it down when you have time and energy. It is a big help to your plants and garden. Our Waxahachie recycling center on Howard Road has mulch available for free. Yes I said for free if you come pick it up. They will load for you on Fridays and Saturdays if you are in line and registered by 1 PM. Other days it is load your own. I used this mulch for years and find it to be great. Hope you find the right mulch for your yard and garden.

For other questions please call the Texas Cooperative Extension Office at 972 825 5175 or catch a Master Gardener at the Waxahachie Farmers' Market

**Interested in Becoming
An Ellis County Master Gardener?**

For further information,
Call the Texas Cooperative Extension
Office at 972-825-5175 or stop by:
701 S. I-35E, Suite 3
Waxahachie, TX 75165