



Ellis County Master Gardener's Ellis-Gardening Newsletter



Volume I, Issue 11

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

December, 2007

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month by month agenda of what you should be doing to your landscape. We will be featuring horticulture articles that we hope you will find interesting, important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website www.ECMGA.com, click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE!

Melinda Kocian, editor

Master Gardener Training

Applications are now available for the 2008 Master Gardener Training program. Texas Master Gardeners are trained members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens. The time commitment is from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday during the month of February. Trainees also will be asked to complete 75 hours of volunteer service before graduating from the Master Gardener program. Application forms are available on the Ellis County Master Gardener's Web site at www.ECMGA.com or by calling 972-825-5175. Tuition for the program is \$100.00. Class size is limited and attendance is required at all sessions to complete the program. Deadline for application is January 11, 2008.

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

The 2008 Gardening Calendars Are Here!

The much-awaited, second annual, Ellis County Master Gardener 2008 gardening calendars will be available as of Wednesday, December 5th! And they're available FREE from the sponsors!!

We want to thank the sponsors for making this such a sought-after, much-anticipated success. Without you it wouldn't have happened.

Animal Hospital of Ovilla
ARK Country Store
Boyce Feed & Grain
Cancun/Acapulco
CNB of Texas
Creative H₂O
Dove's Nest
Gingerbread Press
Jeanette's Embroidery
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The 2008 Ellis County Master Gardener's EXPO is set for March 29th

Anyone wishing to become a sponsor of the 2008 Expo, can find additional information on our website: www.ECMGA.com or contact James Kocian: 972-814-0699, expo.ecmga@yahoo.com or Jamey Guarascio -Cosper at 214-325-4619.

What's Happening in December

Saturday, December 1, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, - Petal Pushers, 972-291-7650, in Cedar Hill. **Christmas Open House**. Snacks and prizes.

Saturday, December 8, 9:00 a.m. - **The Greenery** (showroom), 972-617-5459 – *Planting Bulbs for Spring Color*. Marilyn Simmons of The Greenery will share information on bulbs to plant to have a bounty of spring color.

Saturday, January 12, 2008, 9:00 a.m. to noon - **Pettigrew Academy**, in Waxahachie, 806 E. Marvin Avenue, 972-923-1633. Dallas Zoo Nature Exchange Program. Free; open to the public. Bring Your Nature Items to Trade. **Special snowflakes and ice activities in January**. Children can bring rocks, fossils, pressed leaves or flowers, anything from nature to trade. Get points for your items and start your own account. Spend the points in your account to take home a new treasure from nature. Food, games and crafts.

Holiday at the Arboretum

- **The Semyan's Incredible Holiday Collection**, Nov. 23 thru Jan. 6, 9-5 p.m. - Ornaments, Marionettes and Christmas Figures, 4000 pieces on display. Continuous tours of the DeGolyer Home until 4 p.m.
- **Family Fun Weekends**, Saturdays & Sundays, November 24 thru Dec. 30, 12 noon - 4 p.m. Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer & Frosty the Snowman. Visit Santa. Horse-drawn carriage rides (\$5/person) Photos w/Santa. Live reindeer petting zoo (Sundays only).
- **The Amazing Chocolate Tree National Exhibit**, Through January 6, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. See how America's favorite flavor goes from rain forest to consumer, with a free sample of Dove Chocolate at the end.

Dallas Arboretum, www.dallasarboretum.org, 214-515-6500

It's December - What Needs to be Done?



Featured Plant for December

Crape Myrtle, *Lagerstroemia indica* 'Crape Myrtle'

Easy to grow large deciduous shrub, tolerates any soil. Lacy multicolored flowers bloom all summer. Do not prune back! Offers summer color, fall color, and beautiful bare branches in winter.

Exposure:	Sun
Size:	Ht 15-25' Spread 10-20'
Spacing:	15-20'
Bloom Time:	Summer till Fall

Planting and Sowing

- From mid- to late-month, plant the tulip and hyacinth bulbs that have been chilling for the past 45 days.
- Relocate the established trees and shrubs that were root-pruned in September after they go dormant, usually after the season's first hard freeze.
- Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to attract birds to your landscape and for winter color. Among your best choices are yaupon hollies, pyracanthas, mahonias, western soapberries, and junipers.
- Remove old stalks and leaves from perennial gardens to neaten-up for the winter season and apply a thick layer of winter mulch.
- Add more high-nitrogen fertilizer to your compost pile at the rate of one cup per cubic yard of material.

Garden Watch

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight freeze-cloth cover, which are available at most nurseries and home centers.
- Disconnect water hoses and lawn sprinklers to protect them from freezing, but keep them handy for use during occasional winter dry spells.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Remove mistletoe from trees with a long-handled pole pruner, as there is no effective spray control. Be sure to do this before it produces berries, as birds will spread it by carrying the berries to other branches.
- Fertilize recently transplanted trees and shrubs with a high-phosphate root-stimulator during their first year in their new home.
- Cut out tree roots extending beneath your home's foundation, driveways, patio or walkways. Install a root barrier

Tip of the Month

When designing or evaluating turfgrass areas in the landscape, consider the ease or difficulty in watering the proposed area. Long narrow areas and small odd-shaped areas are difficult for any irrigation equipment to efficiently water.

Growing Tulips in North Texas

Submitted by Diane Hopkins
Ellis County Master Gardener



After roses, tulips are considered the favorite flower. Massed beds of red, yellow, pink and white blooms in early spring are spectacular.

Tulips will produce spring blooms in North Texas but they are not reliable for replenishing themselves, surviving the summer and re-blooming next year. The species types of tulips such as Clusiana, Praestans, Kaufmanniana and Greigii may be an exception to this rule. These shorter growing and early-flowering types are well suited to rock gardens and border plantings and tend to come back year after year if left undisturbed. In all other cases, we should treat tulips as annuals. The bulbs should be dug up and discarded to make room for more productive flowers after they have bloomed.

These spring-blooming bulbs are best adapted to colder climates, but can be grown here if given an artificial winter. Store the bulbs 4-6 weeks in the vegetable bin of your refrigerator at about 40 degrees. Plant the bulbs in late December or early January in a well drained location. A close, color massed planting is a beneficial technique to use with tulips. Plant all the same color and pack them tightly (4 to 8 inches between bulbs).

The planting site can be in full sun but morning sun with afternoon shade seems to be better in our hot climate where the bulbs are used as an annual. The bulbs should be planted at a depth of 2 to 4 times as deep as the bulbs are tall. Keep them well watered, especially as the leaves and buds are emerging and growing. You will get the best flowers by using a high-phosphorus fertilizer at the time of planting and again as growth starts in the spring.

Squirrels love tulip bulbs. Protect the bulbs after they are planted by laying chicken wire over the bed. If you plant the tulips four inches or deeper, one inch wire works and you do not have to remove it. The tulips grow through the holes in the wire. Cover the wire with two inches of fine mulch or compost to help keep the soil cool and moist while it reduces weed germination.

The length of bloom period in the spring is determined by the temperatures. The tulip blooms fade quickly when the spring is hot and dry.

You can purchase bulbs now at your favorite nursery. Reject any wounded or moldy bulbs. Place them in a brown paper sack and refrigerate them until you are ready to plant.

Fall Landscape

Submitted by Jackie Wilhite
Ellis County Master Gardener



This is a great time to evaluate the landscape. Note how the plants have survived the heat of the summer and the dry periods with little or no rainfall. This is also a good year to evaluate the colors of the landscape. The choice plants will have beautiful fall and winter interest as great as the spring and summer foliage and flowers. Among the favorites should be the crape myrtle, wax myrtle, lantana, salvia, live oak, red oak, oleander, roses, day lilies, and iris. This is just a few of the many plants that are well suited for Texas landscapes. Check the list of Texas best at www.texassuperstar.com

The use of color in the landscape needs some consideration and a little preplanning. Red, orange and yellow are considered hot colors. They give the illusion of being closer that they actually are by catching the eye first. These colors create a warm or lively atmosphere and are the best choice for accenting a particular spot. Purple, blue, green or white, on the other hand, give an illusion of being farther away. They also make small areas seem larger by giving the visual appearance of distance. Best uses of

plants in these colors are for a feeling of tranquility and coolness.

Choices for the winter display of color include some trees and shrubs that are covered with colorful berries or fruit. The yaupon holly and possumhaw holly look similar in the summer but are very different in the winter. The female of both species provide berries in the winter. The possumhaw is deciduous while the yaupon is evergreen. The dwarf yaupon holly will not have berries since this variety is always male. These are great accent plants as well as they provide berries for the birds in the winter.

Contact your local Ellis County Extension Office at 972-923-5175 for volunteer Master Gardener assistance.

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.

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made by singing; - "Oh, how beautiful!"
and sitting in the shade.

~ Rudyard Kipling, "The Glory of the Garden"

Garden Checklist for December

Submitted by Diane Hopkins
Ellis County Master Gardener



Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist, Texas Cooperative Extension, A&M University, recommends the following garden checklist for this month.

- Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't over-water. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and open doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- Berry plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.
- Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.
- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- December through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs.
- Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus.
- Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- Plant those spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.
- Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.

Blooming Gifts for the Holidays

Submitted By Diane Hopkins, Ellis County Master Gardener

As the holiday shopping frenzy kicks off this week you can avoid crowded malls by visiting your local nursery and selecting beautiful blooming gifts for friends and family. A blooming plant will bring wonderful color and cheer during gloomy winter weather.

These are some of the recommended blooming beauties that anyone would be glad to receive.

- **African Violets** stay small and don't mind low-light conditions. Water only when the soil feels dry and be sure to keep water off the foliage.
- **Begonias** are another great flowering houseplant. They grow best in bright light. Keep soil evenly moist but never let the plant sit in water. Fertilize with a diluted strength liquid fertilizer every other week. Pinch out the tips of the branches to create a bushier growth pattern.
- **Cyclamens** thrive in cool, humid conditions. Water when dry and avoid getting water on the crown of the plant. Stop watering when blooms fade. Begin watering again when new growth appears, in about two to three months. Feed with a low-nitrogen fertilizer every couple of weeks.
- **Azaleas** prefer cool conditions where daytime temperatures remain around 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep soil moist by submerging the pot in a bucket or sink full of water, and wait until air bubbles disappear. Allow excess water to drain completely. Feed with water-soluble fertilizer once every two weeks after flowering is finished.
- **Orchids** like bright light during winter months and high humidity. Because they don't grow in typical potting soil, water thoroughly and allow to drain completely. Feed every couple of weeks with a fertilizer specific to orchids following the usage directions.
- **Kalanchoe** need to be placed in a sunny, dry location with daytime temperatures in the 70's. Water when the soil begins to feel dry. It's important to fertilize with a water-soluble fertilizer high in phosphorus.
- **Christmas Cactus** is a tropical plant that prefers cool temperatures and moist soil. Fertilize with a balanced houseplant fertilizer when the plant is in bloom. The more light they get the more blooms they will produce.
- **Amaryllis** needs at least four hours of indirect light a day and will need to be staked, they will become top heavy as they grow. These beauties require a weekly watering.
- **Poinsettias** are another tropical that requires bright light and temperatures in the low 70's. Water when dry and allow the water to drain from the pot. If there is a foil or plastic cover on the pot remove it when watering.

And The Winners Are.....

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association is proud to announce the winners of the first ever ECMGA **Photo Contest**. The contest consisted of 3 categories with a first, second and third place being awarded in each category. The categories were Single Specimen, In the Garden and Garden Bounty. Ninety-five digital photo entries were submitted for consideration.

In the Single Specimen category, 1st place goes to Tiffani Siebert, photo "Orange and Yellow Flower. 2nd place goes to Tiffani Siebert, photo "Passion Flower." 3rd place goes to Tiffani Siebert, photo "Double Hibiscus."

In the category, In the Garden, 1st place goes to Carolyn Foster, photo "Butterfly on Salvia." 2nd place goes to Lindy Ellington Nobles, photo "Pumpkins & Mums." 3rd place goes to Ferris High School student Ashley Skates, photo "Tool Shed with Yellow Flowers."

In the category of Garden Bounty, 1st place goes to Hannah Bosse's, photo "Lavender on Verdure." 2nd place goes to Lindy Ellington Nobles, photo "Pumpkins Galore." 3rd place goes to Amanda Towns, photo "Egg Plant."

Each 1st place winner will receive \$31.67. Each 2nd place winner will receive \$22.16 and each 3rd place winner will receive \$9.50. To view these beautiful photos log on to www.ecmga.com and click on photo contest.

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association would like to thank everyone who participated in the contest. Check the website for announcements on the next contest!

Single Specimen Category



1st Place
Tiffani Siebert
"Orange & Yellow Flower"



2nd Place
Tiffani Siebert
"Passion Flower"



3rd Place
Tiffani Siebert
"Double Hibiscus"

In The Garden Category



1st Place
Carolyn Foster
"Butterfly on Salvia"



2nd Place
Lindy Ellington Nobles
"Pumpkins & Mums"



3rd Place
Ashley Skates, Ferris H.S.
"Tool Shed with Yellow Flowers"

Garden County



1st Place
Hannah Bosse
"Lavender on Verdure"



2nd Place
Lindy Ellington Nobles
"Pumpkins Galore"



3rd Place
Amanda Towns
"Egg Plant"

Featured Flowers of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Butterfly Amaryllis *Hippeastrum papilio*



Like many Amaryllis species, the *Hippeastrum papilio* is native to the rainforests of southern Brazil. A relative newcomer to the plant world, the butterfly amaryllis was described and named by Pedro Ravenna in 1970, and later moved to the *Hippeastrum* genus.

Although the plant was assumed to be extinct in the wild, recent reports give hope that there are some remaining stands in the Atlantic coastal rainforest.

The large 6-inch flowers appear from October to February, making it a perfect indoor plant for temperate climates. When the flowers make their annual debut, it's easy to see why the plant is thusly named. The delicate maroon striped markings on stunning chartreuse petals indeed resemble a butterfly. An exotic

and amazing house plant; with care the bulb will reward you with offset bulbs that can be divided.

Type of plant:	Bulbs
Bloom color:	Scarlet (Dark Red), Brown/Bronze, Cream/Tan
Bloom time of year:	Late Winter/Early Spring
Sun requirements:	Full Sun
Cold hardiness:	Zone 4a to Zone 9b
Height:	18-24 in. (45-60 cm)
Spacing:	6-9 in. (15-22 cm), 9-12 in. (22-30 cm)

Golden Chain Tree

Laburnum anagyroides

The golden chain tree is a diminutive, attractive landscape tree that is truly a show-stopper when it's in bloom. The yellow pendulous clusters seem to "rain" down when it blooms each spring.

Laburnum is native of the mountains of Europe, growing in France, Switzerland, southern Germany and northern Italy. The medieval herbalist Gerard recorded references to *Laburnum* growing in Britain as early as 1597. Early European settlers introduced it to the United States.

By the mid 1800s, *Laburnum* had already become a familiar site in the hedgerows; soon thereafter, the poisonous alkaloid Cytisine was discovered in the plant. Care should be taken to avoid ingesting any parts of the plant by humans, pets and livestock.

On a more positive note, the heart wood is such a dark, rich color, it has earned the nickname false ebony. It is durable and can be used as an inlay with other woods.

Type of plant:	Trees
Bloom color:	Bright Yellow
Bloom time of year:	Mid Spring, Late Spring/Early Summer
Sun requirements:	Sun to Partial Shade
Cold hardiness: Zone	5a to Zone 11
Height:	15-20 ft. (4.7-6 m)
Spacing:	10-12 ft. (3-3.6 m)



Earth Kind Rose of the Month



Sea Foam bears clusters of 2” – 3” creamy white, double flowers throughout the growing season. These blossoms have a subtle, light fragrance. This extremely rugged plant has dark green foliage with a glossy sheen. This cultivar also produces beautiful orange-red hips in fall. This non-patented cultivar is easily rooted from cuttings. The Sea Foam rose is great as a mounding ground cover or small climber. It is very winter hardy, and has good disease tolerance. Sea Foam roses have small glossy foliage and white blooms that will add a nice contrast in any landscape.

Height/Habit :	Landscape, floribunda	Habit:	Bush; can be trained as a standard or tree form
Flower Color :	White	Patent Information:	Patented
Fragrance :	Slight	Other Details:	Resistant to mildew and rust, Stems are very thorny
Disease Resistance :	Very Good	Zones :	4 - 9
Petal Count:	15-20		
Bloom Time:	Mid Spring, Blooms repeatedly		

It's December - What Else Needs to be Done

By Carolyn Foster, Ellis County Master Gardener



Where did this year go? It has flown by and is quickly coming to an end. If you haven't prepared your plants to over-winter the cold, you are running out of time. You want to water the well and let drain. Don't forget to wash the foliage; top and under leaves. Inspect for insects on leaves and in the soil. If brought indoors, make sure they have enough light and don't over water. November through February is a good time to plan t trees and shrubs.

- Now is a great time to prune berrying plants such as hollies and pyracantha, while the cut material can be enjoyed inside the house.
- Place orders for seed this month so you will have them when you are ready to plant.
- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- Remember lawns and plants still need water during prolonged dry spells.
- Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, snapdragons and dianthus.
- Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- Plant those spring-flowering bulbs is you haven't done so,
- When Christmas cactus has finished flowering, select a 4-5 joint cutting; insert basal end in moist soil. It should root in 3-4 weeks.

Let's answer some questions

Q. "When should I transplant my perennials?"

A. The answer is simple to remember: if it blooms in the spring, transplant it in the fall. If it blooms in the fall, transplant it in the spring. But there are some exceptions.

Q. "I have geraniums, coleus, impatiens and copper plants. I'd like to save them from the freezing winter weather. Can they grow indoors until spring?"

A. Yes, but only if you place them in a bright area or garden room. They will need less water and fertilizer than when outside. You could also root cutting and over-winter smaller plants.

If you want to enhance your knowledge of the World of Plants and become a part of a great organization, the Ellis County Master Gardeners, simply call 972-825-5175. We have a great library to help research and answer your questions or visit our website at www.ECMGA.com. Remember, help is just a phone call away.

Why Are Sweet Potatoes So Popular?

Submitted by Melinda Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener



- **Because They Are Delicious** - Sweet potatoes have become the rising star in American popular food culture. Network television including the Food Network and celebrated chefs, are featuring vibrant and innovative recipes featuring diverse cultivars of sweet potatoes. These recipes spotlight the nutritious roots' inherent sweetness instead of drowning them in traditional brown sugar and marshmallows.
- **Because They Are Nutritious** - In 1992, the Center for Science in the Public Interest compared the nutritional value of sweet potatoes to other vegetables. Considering fiber content, complex carbohydrates, protein, vitamins A and C, iron, and calcium, the sweet potato ranked highest in nutritional value. According to these criteria, sweet potatoes earned 184 points, 100 points over the next on the list, the common potato.

NOTE: Sweet potato varieties with dark orange flesh have more vitamin A than those with light colored flesh.

Well, Thanksgiving is over and Christmas, with all it's celebrations is just around corner. I don't know about you, but we love sweet potatoes! During the year, I buy them fairly often (but probably not often enough). I will buy fairly large ones; there are just two of us so we split a large one. Scrub them with a vegetable brush, pierce them 6-8 times and bake them. Usually I cook them in the microwave: first off, because it's quicker and for another reason, it doesn't heat up the kitchen by cooking them in the oven for 45-50 minutes, especially during the summer!

But this time of the year, I love to baked them with a cinnamon-infused syrupy mixture. I'm sure you all have your family favorite and it is probably very similar to the one our family fixes. But just in case, I'd like to share mine with you.

Melinda's Sweet Potatoes

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup melted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1-2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/3 cup brown sugar
- Water
- 2-4 sweet potatoes (depending on size)

Thoroughly scrub with a vegetable brush. Prepare a 11 x 14-inch oven proof dish by generously greasing with butter. Parboil sweet potatoes while still in their skins. Once they are partially done, remove from water. Allow them to cool enough to handle without burning yourself. Peel and slice into 1/2-inch thick medallions.

Combine the first 5 ingredients into a saucepan. Add just enough water to moisten sugar. Bring to a slow boil. Arrange medallions in a domino-effect in casserole dish. Usually 3 rows, side by side, will fit in the dish. Pour syrup over potatoes. Cover with foil or a companion lid to the dish. Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake until potatoes are hot through and soft, but not too soft or they will fall apart. Check them after 15-20 minutes. Spoon the syrup from the bottom of the pan over the top of the potatoes to give them a glazed appearance.

This is a recipe my sister-in-law makes; it is so good, it could pass for a dessert!

Janice's Sweet Potato Casserole

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 3 large sweet potatoes | Topping: |
| 1/2 cup butter, melted | 1 cup light brown sugar |
| 1/2 cup sugar | 1 cup chopped pecans |
| 1/3 cup milk | 1/3 cup flour |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla | 1/3 cup butter, melted |
| 2 eggs | |

Cook, peel and mash potatoes. Whip with electric mixer. Stop to remove any strings. Add butter and sugar to warm potatoes and continue mixing. Add milk, vanilla and eggs. Mix well. Buttered an 8 x 12-inch casserole dish. Mix pecan topping ingredients and crumble on top of casserole. Bake for 25-30 minutes at 350°F. It freezes well before or after cooking.

Merry Christmas Everyone!