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# EnviroSmart

ROCKWALL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2025



Photo by Donna Fernandez

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## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Spring classes were a hit, and we're already working on an exciting fall schedule! In the meantime, stop by and say hi at the Rockwall Farmers Market this summer—enjoy the season!

Check our [website](#) for updates!

## HAVE A QUESTION?

We love to talk plants! Visit our Extension Master Gardeners at the Rockwall County Library the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month from 10am - noon. Also, find us at the Extension Office every Wednesday from 10am - noon. Call (972) 204-7660 or email us anytime at: [rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu)



Introducing the first graduating class of Rockwall County **Junior Master Gardeners** from Dorris A. Jones Elementary, completing



**Congratulations to the Jones Garden Warriors!**

the Vegetables and Herbs series! We're so proud of your curiosity, dedication, and green thumbs. Look for us this summer at the Rockwall County Library as we explore Literature in the Garden, another amazing Junior Master Gardener program!



## SEASONAL TO-DO LIST

Whether you're new to the area or need a refresher, check our list of seasonal gardening tasks.

**AgriLife Today** - Top Garden Tips for July

**Vegetable Planting Guide:** When to plant your transplants.

**Weed control:** Pre and post emergent herbicide guidelines.

**Fertilizing and Lawn Maintenance**

**Pruning:** Early summer

## ASK A MASTER GARDENER

Texas A&M Forest Service advises pruning oak trees in the fall if necessary and avoiding pruning from February through June to prevent the spread of oak wilt. Oak wilt is caused by a fungus spread by sap beetles, which are most active in late winter and early spring. Fresh wounds attract these beetles, so if pruning is essential due to a damaged limb or other hazard, be sure to make as few cuts as possible and immediately seal wounds with any type of paint (spray, latex, or oil-based). Remember that pruning always puts stress on trees, so it's best to avoid pruning for appearance alone, especially during times of added stress, such as summer droughts or winter freezes.

- 2. Stop Spread Through Roots**
    - Install a trench at least 4 ft deep and 100 ft beyond the perimeter of infection centers to break up root connections.
    - Cut or gird all trees within the 100-ft barrier (except those injected with fungicide).
  - 3. Inject High-Value Oaks with Fungicide**
    - Identify susceptible, high-value oak trees in proximity to expanding oak wilt infection centers.
    - Consult a trained and licensed arborist (with certified applicator's license) for treatment of susceptible trees with injections of propiconazole (Alamo®).
  - 4. Plant New Trees**
    - Plant trees not susceptible to oak wilt.
    - Favor a diversity of tree species in the landscape by planting trees that are adapted to central Texas.
    - Avoid wounding susceptible oaks during planting.
- For more information on oak wilt in Texas, visit the internet website [www.texasoakwilt.org](http://www.texasoakwilt.org).

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**CAUTION**  
Pesticides used improperly can be injurious to humans, animals, and plants. Follow directions and heed all precautions on the label.

**DISCLAIMER**  
The use of chemical, trade, or institution names in this brochure is for the information and convenience of the reader. Such use does not constitute official endorsement or approval by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of any product or service or the exclusion of others that also may be available.

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### HOW TO Identify and Manage Oak Wilt in Texas



[www.texasoakwilt.org](http://www.texasoakwilt.org)



Updated 2008  
by Texas Forest Service  
Hess-So SB-1

## Summer Vegetable Gardening with Laura!

Texas summers are...well Texas summers. Hope for the best, but expect the rain tap to mostly turn off and the heat to turn up! You may not want to do much in your garden, so this time of year early mornings are your friend. In the early mornings, harvest veggies and herbs for the best flavor, water plants for best water conservation & overall benefit to plants, and do the necessary work with the least amount of heat stress on you. Continue reading below for what to plant when and information on a couple uncommon, heat loving herbs.

\*Start vegetables by seed indoors and you'll be ready with transplants in the fall!

### June

Seed – Black-eyed Peas, Cantaloupe, Cucumber, Corn, Okra, Squash, Watermelon, Zucchini

Transplant – Cucumber, Eggplant, Melons, Peppers, Okra, Squash, Tomatoes, Zucchini  
\*Indoors – Eggplant, Peppers, Tomatoes

## July

Seed – Beans (pole, bush), Black-eyed Peas, Cantaloupe, Corn, Cucumber, Eggplant, Okra, Potatoes, Pumpkins, Southern Peas, Summer Squash, Watermelon, Winter Squash, Zucchini  
Transplant – Cucumber, Eggplant, Okra, Peppers, Pumpkins, Tomatoes, Winter Squash

\*Indoors – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Spinach

## August

Seed – Beans (pole, bush), Black-eyed Peas, Corn, Cucumber, Potatoes, Pumpkins, Southern Peas, Summer Squash, Winter Squash, Zucchini

Transplant – Cucumber, Okra, Pumpkins, Tomatoes, Winter Squash

\*Indoors – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Spinach

## Herbs

As I've mentioned before, herbs are plants grown for culinary purposes, medicinal properties, fragrances, dyes, or any combination thereof. For this article, I'd like to highlight that last property – Dye. Dyes can be colorants that dye clothing but are also used to make paints or glazes. Plants historically grown for dye that grow well in Texas summers include Indigo and Madder root.

Japanese Indigo (*Pericaria tinctoria*), the indigo that dyes your jeans, thrives in our Texas heat and direct sunshine. Though it does require more water than many landscape plants to produce good dye. These plants are started from seed (available online) and will grow fairly quickly. This plant is a tender annual and will be ready for the first harvest when the plants are 1-2 ft tall and bruised leaves turn navy blue. Material dyed with indigo will initially be green like the leaves used, but exposure to oxygen in the air is the chemical reaction needed to turn the dye blue.

Madder root (*Rubia tinctorum*) produces a wonderful variety of reds such as Alizarin Crimson, a common hue in all paint mediums. Seeds are also available online, and germination can take longer than many plants. This plant thrives in Texas but does need good soil drainage and regular watering. This plant is a perennial and hardy in zones 5-9 and it may take a year or more for the roots to produce enough dye. Additionally, it is a climbing plant so plan to have a trellis or grow close to a fence.

To make dye from these plants, you'll need to do some research on techniques and mordants (treatments that help bind the dye and make it permanent) depending on what materials you are dying. There are many tutorials online and several wonderful books on natural dyes in our Rockwall County Library. Have fun this summer growing a garden to DYE for!

## Keeping the pests at bay the natural way

*Randy's Seasonal Garden Care*

As a young gardener, one may find it easy to reach for the bottle of insecticide every time a bug invades your lovely garden or vegetable bed. As time and experience teaches us, the nuclear option of pest control is not the best way to handle the problem. Although it is a quick and easy method to solve a bug problem, chemical insecticides are not selective. These sprays and powders kill bees, praying mantises, and butterflies to the same degree as the squash bugs, aphids, and spider mites that wreak havoc on your fruits and flowers. Before you reach for the can of poison, think about starting with an Integrated Pest Management program using cultural (non-chemical tactics) and biological insects (lady bug larvae shown at right), parasites, and pathogens.



Taking nature's cue, explore the possibility of using our six and eight-legged predators as a means to eradicate pests from your plants. These beneficial insects, mites, and nematodes come with a voracious appetite. And the aphids, beetles, and moth larvae are a welcome addition to the menu. Easily available to purchase online, if you have a pest problem in your garden, beneficial insects can be the first step in maintaining an Integrated Pest Management program.

Beneficial predator	Pests Controlled
<u><a href="#">Braconid Wasps</a></u>	Aphids, armyworms, cabbageworms, caterpillars, codling moths, corn borer, flies, hornworms, moth & beetle larvae
<u><a href="#">Lacewings</a></u>	Aphids, beetles, caterpillars, Colorado potato beetles, corn earworms, leafminers, loopers, mealybugs, moth eggs, red spider mites, scale, thrips, whiteflies
<u><a href="#">Ladybugs</a></u>	Aphids, Colorado potato beetle eggs, mealybugs, soft scales, spider mites, whiteflies
<u><a href="#">Beneficial Nematodes</a></u>	Armyworms, black vine weevil, cabbage loopers, chafers, Colorado potato beetle, corn rootworm, cucumber beetle, cutworms, earwig, fleas, fungus gnat larvae, grubworms, mole cricket, onion maggots, roaches, root weevils, seed corn maggots, sowbugs, termites, ticks, wireworms
<u><a href="#">Praying Mantis</a></u>	Aphids, beetles, caterpillars, flies, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, wasps
<u><a href="#">Predatory Mites</a></u>	European red spider mites, rust mites, thrips, two-spotted spider mites
<u><a href="#">Soldier Beetles</a></u>	Aphids, borers, caterpillars, cucumber beetle larvae, grasshopper eggs, moth larvae
<u><a href="#">Tachinid Flies</a></u>	Beetles, cabbage loopers, caterpillars, codling moths, corn borers, crickets, cutworms, grasshoppers, katydids, sawflies, squash bugs, stink bugs
<u><a href="#">Trichogramma Wasps</a></u>	Cabbage looper, codling moth, corn earworm, cutworm, hornworms, pecan casebearer

If you do find that your garden is overwhelmed with pests, or you aren't patient enough to let the beneficial insects do their job, you may have to use cultural remedies to get the job done. These remedies use natural solutions that are either broadcast or sprayed through the garden to control insects, worms, and mites where they feed. If you do choose to utilize any of the liquid spray formulas below, **SPRAY IN THE EVENING TO MINIMIZE CONTACT WITH BEES AND BUTTERFLIES**. And frankly, the same rule applies even if you choose to use a chemical spray control. Getting rid of pests are the common goal but so should protecting those insects that we desire. 😊

Cultural Control	Pests Controlled	Notes
Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt)	Armyworms, beetles, cabbage loopers, cabbageworms, caterpillars, Colorado potato beetle larvae, corn borers, cutworms, mosquitos, tomato hornworms	Comes in powder or liquid forms
Diatomaceous earth (DE)	Aphids, cabbage root flies,	Avoid breathing dust. Wear

	caterpillars, corn borers, fleas, leafhoppers, mites, pill bugs, slugs, snails, sowbugs, stink bugs, thrips, ticks	mask & goggles.
Horticultural oils	Insect eggs, larvae, and soft-bodied adult insects including aphids, leafhoppers, leaf miners, mealybugs, mites, scale, thrips, whiteflies	Use light-grade oils during growing season. Heavy dormant oils used in winter will burn summer crops.
Insecticidal soap	Aphids, mites, leafhoppers, mealybugs, mites, scale, thrips, whiteflies	Spray in late evening. Direct sun will burn the crop.
Neem oil	Aphids, beetles, corn earworms, fungus gnats, hornworms, leaf miners, loopers, mealybugs, spider mites, thrips, whiteflies	Spray in late evening. Direct sun will burn the crop.
Pyrethrum	Aphids, armyworms, beetles, caterpillars, Colorado potato larvae, fleas, leafhoppers, mites, stink bugs, termites, thrips, ticks, treehoppers, whiteflies	Comes in powder or liquid forms
Garlic or Pepper sprays	Aphids, cabbage loopers, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, mites, mosquitos, slugs, snails, squash bugs, thrips, treehoppers, whiteflies, birds, deer, rabbits, cats, dogs	Both available in liquid forms. Home remedies can also be found online.  Reapply after rains or irrigation.

For more information on organic pest control, go to the Texas A&M Agrilife Organic Insect Management page at <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/organic/crops/insect-management/>

[Ladybug larvae image](#) courtesy of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Photo by Drees.

## VEGETABLE SPOTLIGHT

When asked what vegetable thrives and is easy to grow in the Texas heat – Okra is the very first that comes to mind. There are **several wonderful varieties**, with Clemson Spineless probably being the seed with the easiest availability.

Okra seeds can be planted now and throughout the summer in fertile, well-draining soils. Okra is not a plant that grows well in pots as these plants get very large and have deep root systems for support. Mature plants should be spaced at least a foot apart. Okra survives well in drought conditions but will produce much higher yields with regular watering.


While other plants (such as tomatoes) will struggle or will stop setting fruit in the high heat of summer, Okra produces well – maybe a little too well! Okra pods need to be harvested almost every day and very quickly. As soon as

you see an okra pod at optimal size, pick it right then as even a few hours later it could be too large. Okra pods allowed to grow over 3-4 inches are usually too tough or stringy to eat.

As Okra is a very mucilaginous (fancy word for “gets very slimy”) vegetable they are best pickled or cooked with lots of heat, either fried or boiled. High heat in cooking or paired with high acid content cuts down on the slime – that’s why they are so good cooked with tomatoes!

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## Easy Gardening

OKRA • OKRA • OKRA • OKRA • OKRA • OKRA

*Joseph Masabni, Assistant Professor and Extension Horticulturist, The Texas A&M University System*

**O**okra is a warm-season vegetable that grows well in most Texas soils. A fair source of vitamin A, it can be eaten in many ways, including boiled, fried, and cooked in soups, gumbos, and casseroles.

### Varieties

The best okra varieties to grow in Texas are Annie Oakley (Compact), Blondy (Compact), Burgundy, Cajun Delight, Clemson Spineless, Emerald, Lee, Louisiana Green, Stewart's Zeebest (Heirloom), and Velvet.

### Site selection

For good yields, okra must grow in full sunlight in fertile, well-drained soil.


### Soil preparation

Work the soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to garden tools. Spade or turn the soil as deeply as possible. Okra

will grow best in soil that has been worked 8 to 10 inches deep.  
Remove all rocks and trash from the soil, and then rake it soil smooth.

### Planting

For the best yields, plant okra in the spring 2 to 3 weeks after all danger of frost has passed. For a good fall crop, plant at least 3 months before the first fall frost.  
Plant the okra seeds about 1 inch deep and 2 inches apart in the row (Fig. 1). Space the rows at least 3 feet apart.



**Figure 1.** Plant okra seeds about 2 inches apart and 1 inch deep.

## Mastering the Art of Color for a Harmonious Garden

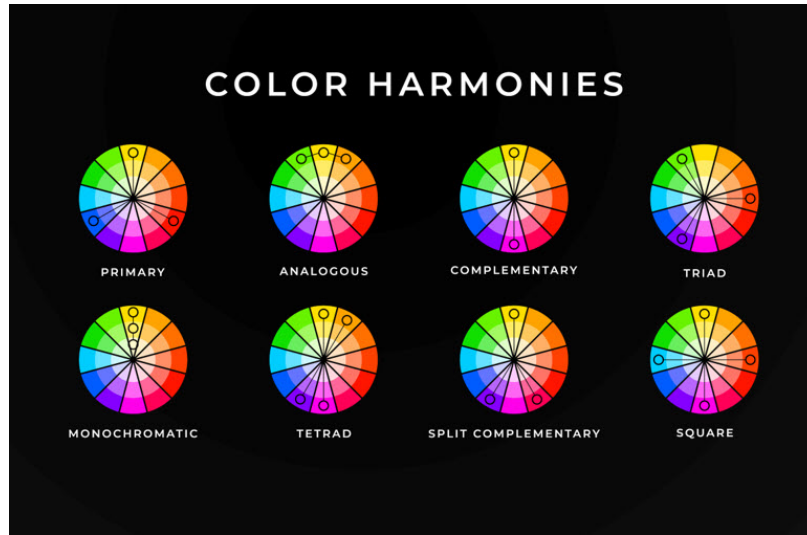
*thoughts from Ann*



Color is a powerful tool in a gardener’s design palette. Beyond the shapes of blooms or leaf texture, it’s the interplay of hues that will turn an ordinary garden into a place of serenity, excitement, and elegance. Whether you are aiming for a vibrant eye-catching display or a soft, calming retreat, understanding how to use color purposefully can transform your garden into a cohesive and harmonious space. One of the most effective ways to master this is by using the principles of the color wheel.

When planning a garden, using the color wheel can help create a visually stunning and harmonious space. By understanding color relationships—such as complementary, analogous, and contrasting hues—you can design a garden that feels balanced and dynamic. As fashion designer Oscar de la Renta once said, “Gardening is how I relax. It’s another form of creating and playing with colors.” Just

like in fashion or art, selecting the right colors in a garden can evoke emotions, highlight focal points, and make the space truly come alive. Whether pairing warm oranges with cool blues or blending soft pastels for a calming effect, the color wheel serves as a guide to crafting a garden that is both aesthetically pleasing and deeply personal.



The color wheel and chart show numerous ways to incorporate color when planning your garden.

Color Combinations	Color Examples	Texas Native Plants to Use	Reason to Use in Your Garden
<u>Complimentary colors</u> are opposite each other on the color wheel and have one cool color and one warm color	Purple/yellow Blue/orange Red/green	Yellow- Plains Coreopsis Purple- Winecup	Creates colorful contrast and a distinctive focal point
<u>Analogous colors</u> are next to each other on the color wheel	Red, orange, yellow Green, blue green, blue	Red- Scarlet Sage Orange- Fragrant Gaillardia Yellow- Texas Lantana	Gives your garden a cohesive appearance
<u>Triadic colors</u> are 3 colors evenly spaced around the color wheel	Pink, purple, green Orange, green, purple	Pink-Eastern Redbud Purple- Prairie Larkspur Green- Green Milkweed	Offers your garden a variety of color that keeps your garden vibrant
<u>Monochromatic</u> colors are a single color in various shades, tints, and tones.	Any color	Deep purple- Blue Wild Indigo Blue- Texas Verbena Violet- Spiderwort	Provides elegance, depth, texture, and leaf color

Start planning your flower beds by thinking about colors that reflect your personal taste and style then go from there. Study the color wheel/chart for color combinations that appeal to you. Find your planting zone then search for **Texas Native plants** that grow in your zone. Texas native plants are well-adapted to each of our **planting zones** and require less maintenance and water. Perennial flowers are good choices as they can provide year after year of color without replanting annually.

Things to keep in mind during your final plant color choices.

- a. Dark colors will recede into the environment/Lighter colors will be more noticeable
- b. Warm colors are energizing and exciting- red, yellow, orange
- c. Cool colors make your space look larger and are calming- blue, purple, pink
- d. Sunset colors like apricot, coral, and orange add warmth and energy
- e. Consider adding nectar-rich flowers for attracting pollinators and birds
- f. Add interest with contrasting textures of leaves, flowers, shrubs, and trees
- g. Plant selected flowers in groups of three or an odd number to add dimension and visual interest
- h. Use [EarthKind](#) practices when composting, mulching, and using water-wise plants.

Remember that the colorwheel is a helpful tool that will help you choose harmonious color combinations that excite and visually stun the viewer. When you select complementary or contrasting colors you are actively adding interest and a new dimension to your garden. Give the colorwheel tool a try to explore creative combinations that you have not considered before. Making plant color choices based on color compatibility can only make your gardening planning more efficient and the outcome harmoniously pleasing.

## Survey

Would you want the Rockwall County Master Gardeners to host classes or events in your city?

Yes. Please come to ROYSE CITY.

Yes. Please come to McLENDON-CHISHOLM.

Yes. Please come to FATE.

Yes. Please come to HEATH.

No. ROCKWALL is a good central location for RCMG activities.

## The Mosquito Bucket of DOOM!!

*by Sarah Lawson*

At the first sign of mosquitoes in our yard, my husband automatically reaches for pesticide as his go-to method of control. But two years ago, I learned about a new approach from Dr. Doug Tallamy, a well-known entomology professor at the University of Delaware. His philosophy is simple: to effectively control mosquitoes, you must target them in the larval stage. See Dr. Tallamy explain the method [here](#).

The **Mosquito Bucket of Doom** is a lethal breeding trap. It cleverly exploits the mosquito's natural behavior—female mosquitoes are drawn to stagnant water for laying eggs. This trap mimics an ideal breeding site, but with a twist: it kills the larvae before they can mature into adults. Wanting to protect beneficial insects, I convinced my husband to give up pesticides and try the buckets last year.

Mosquitoes are especially attracted to red, orange, black, and cyan. A typical setup uses a bucket in one of these colors, filled with a small amount of organic material such as dried grass clippings, leaf litter, hay, or straw. Then,



a biological larvicide like *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (Bti) is added. Bti is a naturally occurring bacterium that specifically targets mosquito larvae without harming people, pets, or wildlife. A popular commercial form of Bti is Mosquito Dunks.

We've placed four black buckets around our 2,400-square-foot backyard, each one carefully hidden from view. I chose black because it helps the buckets blend into the garden. The color and organic content attract female mosquitoes to lay eggs, and once the larvae hatch, the Bti in the water destroys their digestive systems—effectively halting the life cycle and preventing new mosquitoes from emerging.

Some versions of the bucket include mesh covers to keep small animals out or sticks to allow small animals an escape route if they fall in. I use hydroponic mesh lids on three of my buckets to prevent my dog from drinking the water. While it won't harm her to drink from the buckets, I prefer she leave them alone.

The beauty of the Mosquito Bucket of Doom lies in its simplicity and sustainability. One bucket can kill thousands of larvae over a single season. Because Bti is non-toxic to beneficial insects and humans, it offers a low-risk, eco-friendly solution. When adopted widely, these traps can significantly reduce mosquito populations across entire neighborhoods.

I deployed our buckets this year in mid-April. To my surprise, within just a few days, each one was teeming with dead mosquito larvae. I maintain them by checking the water level regularly and adding a quarter of a mosquito dunk each month. To winterize, I simply empty the buckets and leave them turned over in place.

You're probably wondering if my husband was satisfied with this new method? I am happy to report that he is now a believer! An added bonus—besides minimal mosquitoes—was the remarkable increase in fireflies we saw last summer. Mission accomplished!

The Mosquito Bucket of Doom is a simple, effective, and environmentally friendly way to reduce mosquitoes. Give it a try!

## MG's Around Town



The Extension Master Gardener program is focused on educating and providing research-based horticultural information to the community. This spring we visited with Rockwall's youth, adult, and senior populations.

Ask a Master Gardener & Library Help Desk  
Intro to Beekeeping Class  
Fairy Garden Workshop for adults  
The Ark Preschool Jungle Bugs  
Vegetable Gardening Class  
Senior Outreach-The Center and Fate Community Center  
Texas Native Plants Class  
Spring Plant Sale  
Junior Master Gardener @ Jones Elementary  
Life Cycle of Flowers - Youth  
H.A.T.S. make and take  
Rockwall Youth Fair  
Cactus and Succulent Class  
Cut Flower Garden Class  
Worm Composting Class - Youth  
Senior Outreach-Highland Meadows and RC Medical Lodge  
Meals on Wheels Mother's Day Bouquets  
Baby Bluebird Explores the Garden - Youth  
Rockwall Founders Day  
Cotton Patch Planting @ the Historical Museum  
Royse City ISD AG Days  
Rockwall Farmers Market



# WE LOVE BUGS!

## Good Bugs in Disguise

Stink bugs often get a bad rap but is the stink bug in your garden a beneficial predator or a plant pest? It depends on the species! Predatory stink bugs (the good bugs), like the **Spined Soldier bug** (*Podisus maculiventris*), are beneficial insects that feed on plant pests like caterpillars, beetle larvae, and aphids. Their stouter and shorter mouthparts (beaks) are used to suck fluid from their prey. Herbivorous stink bugs (the bad bugs), such as the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (*Halyomorpha halys*), are plant pests. They have long, slender mouthparts adapted for piercing plant tissues and feeding on fruits, leaves, and stems.



## Stay In Your Lane

*Plants that Grow Beyond their Borders by Debora Z.*

No one likes to be pushed around, however even in the plant world there are those that take up more room than desired. They're quiet, they're stealthy and sometimes even beautiful but they take up a lot of room just the same. All garden oppressors are not necessarily officially "invasive" but share some of their characteristics. Some gardeners prefer the terms such as "aggressive plant", "low spreading habit", "dense rhizomes", "prolific self-seeders" or "fast multiplier" to describe them.

Some common "predominant" plants you may have seen are:

- **Obedient Plant - *Physostegia virginiana***
- **Morning Glory - *Ipomoea tricolor***
- **Oxalis- *Oxalis drummondii***
- **Lilies of the Valley- *Convallaria majalis***
- **Cana Lilly - *Canna x generalis***
- **Primrose White Evening - *Oenothera pallida***
- **Mint- *Mentha***
- **Catnip - *Nepeta cataria***
- **Amaranth - *Amaranthus cruentus***

Many dominant garden plants spread by prolific seeding, by underground roots, rhizomes, or stolons. Some will be easier to pull out than others. Some have other varieties that are less aggressive. Knowing what to expect is half the battle. Ask how the plant grows and spreads before buying it. Look up any potential overbearing plants you already have on hand to learn how to care for them and limit their spread. You can get around aggressive spreading by growing the plant in a pot or separate bed. To remove them, you must dig up and remove the roots and bulbs attached to the leaves using a trowel or weeder. Like all plants that we have come to love, some well known spreading plants can still be enjoyed if you find ways to limit their space.



Shhhhh...can you hear it? That ever so soft, slithering



sound? Wait...listen...hear it? Slither-slide, creep and crawl, and, oh! There goes another slither! That rather silent, slithering sound is being made by Mr. E. Mr. E is an earthworm, and he is the most silent of slitherers and sliders in the garden. Earthworms are **detritivore**. They slide and glide below, and at the surface, of the soil eating organic matter like dying leaves and plants. The primary job of Mr. E and his fellow earthworms is to help the **soil** in our yards and gardens be healthy. It takes lots of slithering and sliding to do this, and Mr. E is one of the best!

If you would like to see an earthworm up close, take a small shovel and dig in your garden where the soil is moist but not wet. You won't have to dig too deep to find Mr. E or any of his friends. Earthworms stay close to the surface of the soil. Because they live and tunnel close to the surface, they don't survive the cold of winter. However, they lay eggs that can survive the cold. These eggs are wrapped in **tiny sacks that protect them from freezing**, and a new batch of earthworms is born every spring when the soil starts to warm. Our Mr. E is one of these young ones!

Like the average earthworm, Mr. E is only a few inches long. His body is composed of small segments, **annuli**, that look like little rings. There are tiny bristles on each of these segments. Called setae, these bristles are what help him and his fellow slitherers slide through the soil! And when they slide through the soil, they loosen it up and make tunnels. These tunnels provide pathways for water and air to get to plant roots more easily. Also, earthworms make the soil more nutritious with their poo! That's right! The dead and decaying leaves, plants, and roots they eat contain important nutrients, so when they poo, they put these healthy nutrients back into the soil. This poo is called **castings**, and when these castings enrich the soil, the plants are healthier too!

Earthworms primarily stay below the soil's surface because they have no resistance to the sun's ultraviolet radiation. If they are exposed to the sun, their skin will dry out, and they will die. They have no arms, legs, or eyes. However, they can sense light, and they use this ability to protect themselves from sun exposure. And that's why we will always find helpful earthworms and our busy friend, Mr. E, working hard under the surface of the garden soil! We will leave them there for now, sliding and gliding their tunnels into the soil, dropping an occasional poo as they go. Bye, bye, Mr. E!

### **Learning Questions**

What is an earthworm's primary job?

How does earthworm poo help the soil and plants?

Why do earthworms stay below the surface of the soil?

Try these **Crafty Ideas!**

## Something I learned today!



Besides attracting all kinds of butterflies as a food source, Texas Lantana (*Lantana urticoides*) is a host plant for this particular butterfly, the Lantana Scrub Hairstreak!

<https://dallascountymastergardeners.org/texas-lantana/>

## Master SNAPS!

Photos from Rockwall County Extension Master Gardeners



Columbine after a rain  
-Victoria P.



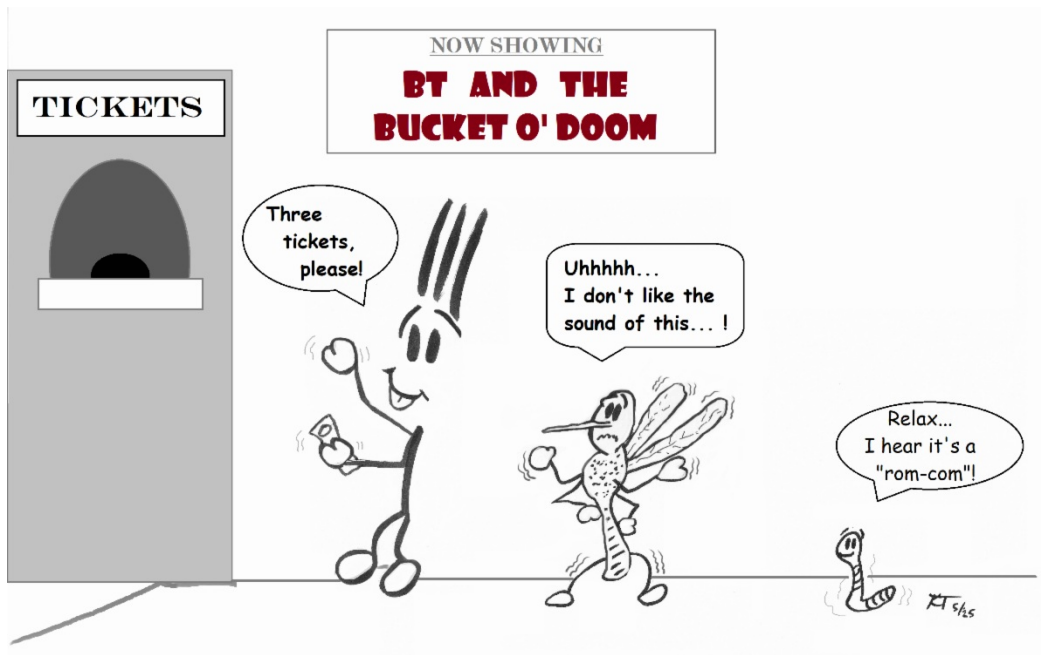
It's BEEutiful.  
-Donna F.



Poppy at the Discovery Garden  
-Randy C.

## Pokey!

by Kim Townsend



Please take our short [survey](#) to help improve our educational outreach.

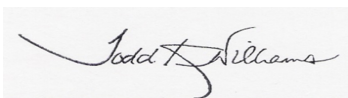
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