

January - February - March 2026

The Wood Works

Vegetable Issue



Vegetable Issue

Greetings Master Gardeners,
Happy New Year to all the returning Master Gardeners!
Welcom to all the new Interns in the training class!
As we begin a new year, it's good to take a moment to reflect on our goals. Look at what worked out well and what kind of learning experiences did we have. There are so many challenging factors in gardening that we have no control over, yet we keep moving forward, knowing that the end results can be so rewarding! So, we make plans to mitigate the problems and elevate the successes.

I think one of the big reasons I enjoy being a part of the Wood County Master Gardener Association (WCMGA) is the fact that I am not the only one who is dealing with the challenges. I have a network of gardeners I can tap into to solve these challenges. At the very least, there are fellow gardeners to cheer me on, talk about possible solutions or just act as a sounding board. All that is huge to me!

Together, we are a group of people with a vast wealth of knowledge that each is willing to share with their fellow Master Gardeners. That is the hidden gem in our organization. The book learning is a great framework, but shared personal experiences add the color to complete the picture. We should never underestimate how powerful that is.

I look forward to building on our network, sharing our knowledge with each other, sharing that combined knowledge with the general public, and working together towards common goals. Everyone is important. Everyone has something to offer the group.

There are so many opportunities to add value to the WCMGA through volunteering: working at one of the seven project gardens, working on a fundraiser event, helping on a committee, attending the meetings and programs, or sharing your knowledge through presentations. It's all important. Okay, that was a shameless plug..... but I won't apologize for it! LOLI Believe we have a great organization due to the greatness of our members. I appreciate each one of you and thank you for everything you do towards the success of the WCMGA.

Have a great gardening day!



**Valerie Wilcox MG 2024
President**

Warm wishes for the new year. Wood County Master Gardeners begins this season with new officers and a new group of Interns, and with it comes a refreshed newsletter. Each edition will center on a theme and also includes a few familiar pieces. This issue focuses on vegetables— from growing them in winter to caring for them organically. As you plan your spring vegetable garden and explore seed catalogues, enjoy the chicken soup and hot water cornbread recipes. Your stories and ideas help make this newsletter truly ours.

Pam Bruner, editor

To contribute articles, photos, or theme ideas, email:

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Articles may be edited for length.



**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION**

**WRITTEN BY WOOD COUNTY MASTER
GARDENERS IN COOPERATION WITH THE
WOOD COUNTY OFFICE OF TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE EXTENSION SERVICE**



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TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Wood County

Hilary Grider

County Extension Agent – Ag/Natural Resources

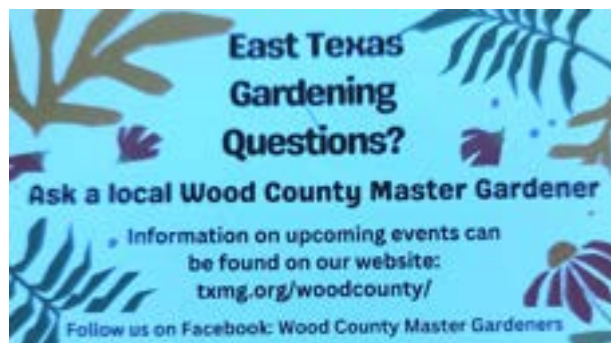
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Vegetable Issue

From My Garden to Yours: Memories and Moments for Vegetables

Howdy Master Gardeners,

Welcome to the very first edition of our Wood County Master Gardener newsletter! I couldn't think of a better way to begin than by celebrating the humble heroes of our plates and gardens – vegetables. They may not always get the spotlight like a sizzling steak or a prized pink primrose, but oh, the stories they could tell if they could talk!

As many of you know, I haven't had the greenest thumb these last few years. Still, I have wonderful memories of digging potatoes as a child until my hands were covered in dirt, eating cherry tomatoes straight off the vine, and tasting the sweetest corn from Mr. Ables, garden next door. These days, when we think about vegetables, we often connect them to better health – for our bodies and our spirits. Maybe we should be thinking about it for the memories as well... or all the above.

With this new season on the horizon, I want to challenge you to consider why you might want to add a vegetable or two to your garden this spring. Is it for your health? A fond memory? The challenge of committing to the process because you know you can do it. Or simply the joy of sharing the bounty a garden brings with family and friends?

Community is woven into everything we do, and a vegetable garden is community in action; for your family, for your friends, for the soil and the air above it, and for all the little critters who live around and beneath it. So, let's break out a favorite seed packet or starter this spring and get planting.

I know I'll be looking for tomatoes for Gage and okra for Ed and myself, as they became favorites during our last garden.

Syrup tubs here we come!!

With warmth and just a little dirt under my nails,

Hilary Grider-Henk

You're not-so-green-thumbed CEA!



****Is It a Vegetable or a Fruit?****

A botanist explains vegetables as the parts of a plant we eat—roots, stems, tubers, and leaves. Examples include carrots, celery, potatoes, and spinach. Fruits, on the other hand, are the seed-holding parts of flowering plants, such as tomatoes, squash, peppers, beans, and corn. Chefs take a simpler view. They look at how we use the food: vegetables for savory dishes and fruits for sweeter ones. No matter the category, they're all packed with goodness. So yes—your mama's advice still stands: "Eat your vegetables. They're good for you."

LuEsther T. Mertz Library Plant & Research Help, [What is the difference between a fruit and a vegetable? https://libanswers.nybg.org/faq/222643](https://libanswers.nybg.org/faq/222643)



Master Garner 2024

Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. – Miles Kington

Vegetable Issue

Time For the Second Round of Cool Season Crops

By Barbara Williams Class of '17

So you didn't get your fall crop in by September, or you did and a freeze took it out... not to worry, thanks to our mostly mild weather, a lot of those crops can still go in the ground now for a decent harvest this spring.

While cauliflower, parsnips, brussels sprouts, and broccoli are not recommended at this time due to their long growing season- leaf lettuces, arugula, carrots, radishes, beets, kale, cilantro, garlic, onion (from sets), kohlrabi, mustard, some peas, spinach, and turnips are good to start now.

Radishes- I love radishes! I have multiple varieties and on the back of the seed packet it says whether to plant in the fall or in the spring. I let some planted in the fall go to seed to feed the first wave of pollinators, plus they're really pretty flowers! And since I harvest before it gets too hot (I'm not one for the spicy), I plant them in the same bed I'll use for basil in May



Herb bed with radish seeds. February '25

Onions- while technically you can grow from seed in the fall, I've not been able to, so I plant from sets in mid-February. I plant my onions roughly 1.5-2 inches apart and then harvest every other one as a green onion leaving the others to bulb.

Vegetable Issue

Last spring, I planted three rows of onions in my raised bed. I put several inches of soil over the 10-20-10 fertilizer in the trench between the rows and scattered carrot seeds over the top. When it came time to plant my peppers in there, I just took out the onions and carrots that were in the way and popped in the pepper plants. This worked out great, by the time in May when the onions came out (carrots were pulled when they looked ready) the peppers were strong enough to love the heat without protection.

**Raised bed with onion sets
and carrot seeds. February '25**



Vegetable Issue

Lettuce and Arugula- Leaf lettuce does better in our area because it's cut and come again, no waiting for the entire head to develop. I have a circle planter that I divide into wedges- regular arugula, green leaf lettuce, wasabi arugula, and merlot lettuce seeds get sown in their section. This year I'm not going to bother with the lettuce, turns out I don't really eat it lol Instead, I'll try beets again.



Planter for lettuce and arugula. February '25

Cilantro- I'm still looking for the best place to plant cilantro. This year I'll try the bed reserved for turmeric and ginger, I'll just leave spaces for the latter to be added after fear of frost is over (March 15th is the date for our area, I still wait till mid-April though). Fun fact- each "seed" is actually a pod that contains two seeds.

Garlic- I actually got my garlic planted last October, so we'll see how it does this spring. My dentist plants his garlic at the base of trees on his property and when they're ready to harvest- he pulls them up, puts one clove back and is ready for the next harvest. I'm still looking for a spot to try this out. I would love a harvest each spring without having to remember to plant it!

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Sugar snap peas- I plant these in the fall and again in the spring. There seems to always be a freeze that gets them, so the biggest harvest is usually in the spring. This year I'm planting them on the cattle panel I'm going to use for loofahs. The loofah seeds get planted in March, but the plants take so long to really get going that the sugar snap peas will be done before it's an issue.



**Trellis with Magnolia
Sugar Snap Peas.
November '25**

I took the advanced training for vegetables in 2019 and have been experimenting ever since! Feel free to reach out to me with any veggie/herb questions you have.



Barbara Williams Class of '17

Vegetable Issue

Grow Stronger Gardens with Smart Plant Pairings

Companion planting brings plants together in helpful ways. Indigenous Americans practiced this long before European contact, especially through the “Three Sisters”: corn for support, beans for nutrients, and squash for shade and weed control. These ancient methods still offer simple ways to grow stronger gardens today.

Advantages

- Mixing plants helps keep harmful insects away while bringing in helpful ones.
- Bright flowers like marigolds and zinnias bring more pollinators, which helps vegetables such as tomatoes, beans, and squash.
- Makes better use of the garden space.
- Supports healthier soil.

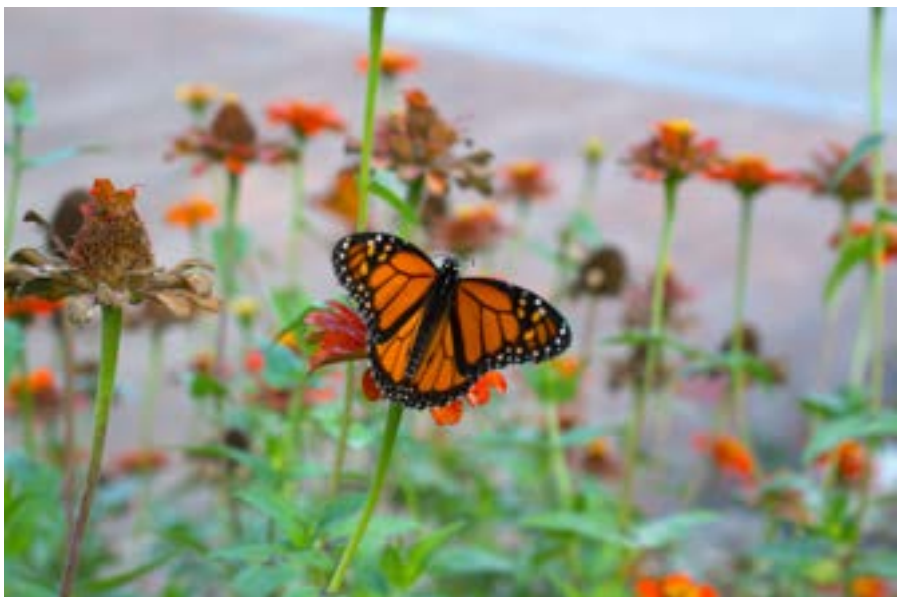


Photo from Canva.com

Vegetable Issue

Companion planting offers a natural way to manage pests. Trap crops, such as nasturtiums, pull pests away from nearby plants. Repellent crops, including herbs and French marigolds, help keep pests from settling in. Plants with bold scents can either draw in helpful insects or keep harmful ones at bay.



Photo from Canva.com



Photo from Canva.com

Vegetable Issue

Ways companion planting can help improve soil

Plants with a deep tap root can bring moisture and nutrients up to plants with nitrogen.
A mixture of vegetables, flowers, and herbs can benefit your vegetable garden.

Sources

USDA National Agriculture Library U. S. Department of Agriculture, “The Three Sisters of Indigenous American Agriculture”, <https://www.nal.usda.gov/collection/stories/three-sisters>

Hoidal, Natalie, “Companion Planting in Home Gardens”, <https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/companion-planting-home-gardens>

Vanheems, Benedict, “Companion Planting Chart: Tomatoes, Potatoes, and Veggies! Best Vegetable Pairings in the Garden-Rooted in Research and Time-tested Gardening Wisdom”, <https://www.almanac.com/companion-planting-guide-vegetables>



Pam Bruner MG 2024

Growing Vegetables Organically

By Linda Mahony

“Feed the soil, not the plant.”

That’s the guiding principle of organic gardening — nurturing the life beneath the surface so that healthy, thriving plants naturally follow. Organic vegetable gardening is about working with nature, not against it, by using natural materials and sustainable methods instead of synthetic chemicals.

Start with Quality Seeds

Healthy gardens begin with healthy seeds. Choose organic vegetable seeds from trusted suppliers such as:

Eden Brothers, Burpee Seeds, True Leaf Market, High Mowing Seeds, Botanical Interests, Territorial Seed, and Seed Savers Exchange.

(Note: While Johnny’s Seeds and Ferry-Morse carry some organic options, not all their seed lines are certified organic.)

Feed the Soil Naturally

Building and maintaining nutrient-rich soil is the cornerstone of organic success. Here are some tried-and-true techniques to keep your garden soil healthy and productive year after year:

Water deeply and infrequently to encourage strong root systems.

Plant nitrogen-fixing crops (like beans and peas) to naturally enrich the soil.

Fertilize naturally with worm castings or fish emulsion to support new plantings.

Top off with compost every season to replenish organic matter.

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Mulch generously (2–4 inches) to retain moisture, moderate soil temperature, suppress weeds, and slowly release nutrients.

Rotate crops every three years to prevent pest and disease buildup.

Plant companion plants — vegetables love flowers! They attract pollinators and deter unwanted pests.

Use cover crops like clover or hairy vetch to keep bare soil productive and nitrogen-rich.

Add mycorrhizal inoculant to seed holes or transplants — it helps roots absorb more water and nutrients.

Avoid tilling. Instead, smother grass and weeds with cardboard, then layer on rich soil or build raised beds with cardboard, wood debris, and composted soil.

Suppress weeds naturally. For larger plots, mow and water the area, then cover with a silage tarp for several months to eliminate grass and weeds before planting.

Control weeds manually — pull them before they seed, or use a flame weeder carefully.



Using plastic silage tarps will kill initial weeds and grass.

Vegetable Issue



Tarped soil is ready to plant after 3-6 months, depending on the season.

Smart Gardening Practices

Plant at the right time. Refer to [Texas A&M AgriLife's Vegetable Planting Guide \(Jan 2025\)](#) for zone-specific recommendations.

Harvest regularly. Frequent picking encourages continued production.

Increase spacing. Good airflow and sunlight help prevent disease and strengthen growth.

Include perennials. Fruit trees, asparagus, blueberries, and perennial herbs create structure and stability, reduce soil disturbance, and promote biodiversity — forming the foundation of a “food forest.”

Standardize beds. Uniform plots make watering, mulching, and harvesting more efficient.

Vegetable Issue

Spotlight on Comfrey: The Gardener's Friend

One favorite among organic gardeners is Comfrey Bocking 14, a sterile cultivar of Russian comfrey. It's a powerhouse plant whose roots can grow up to 15 feet deep, pulling nutrients to the surface and enriching surrounding soil.

Comfrey leaves, stems, and blooms are valuable additions to the compost pile and can even serve as nutritious chicken treats!

Plant comfrey near fruit trees or at the edge of garden beds — its drooping purple blooms from spring through frost provide vital pollen for bees and other pollinators. (Avoid planting directly in vegetable beds, as it can spread and compete for space.)

Lessons from the Past

History reminds us that soil health is everything. During the 1930s Dust Bowl, farmers revived the land by planting trees as windbreaks, rotating crops, and reducing tillage. Those same principles guide today's organic gardeners in protecting soil, conserving water, and nurturing a resilient growing system.

In the End...

Growing vegetables organically isn't just about avoiding chemicals — it's about fostering a living ecosystem beneath your feet. When we feed the soil, the soil returns the favor with vibrant plants, abundant harvests, and a garden that truly thrives.

Let's keep growing — naturally!



Scott and I amongst our raised beds.

Vegetable Issue

I Was Wondering ...

I would love to learn about growing asparagus.

When planting asparagus make sure you plant in well-draining organic soil. Place plants 18-24 inches apart with the crown 6 inches below ground level. Lightly cover the crown and add more soil as needed during the growing season. If planting seeds, wait 3 years to harvest. If planting crowns, you can lightly harvest the first year. Harvest established plants 4-6 weeks in the spring. Then lightly harvest and allow some spears to develop into ferns. The best time to divide and plant asparagus is in the winter. For more information check out the “Everything Texans Ask About Gardening” listed on page 19 of this publication.

How do you know when a sweet potato is ready to harvest?

The sweet potato root has a delicate skin that is easily bruised at harvest. Take care not to bruise the roots with a hoe, shovel, or other harvesting tool. Even dropping the potatoes into a harvest bucket will injure the skin. For home gardeners, the best time to harvest sweet potatoes is immediately before or just after the first fall frost. When the sweet potato leaves turn yellow, growth has stopped and the roots have matured. This is a good time for harvest.

What are the best vegetables to grow in our area each season?

To answer this question would take a whole article itself. I refer to the planting guide included in this newsletter for best times to plant. You can also refer to the East Texas Vegetable Planting Guide. This PDF, developed by the Henderson County Master Gardeners, includes a list of vegetables grown in the East Texas area from beans to watermelon. You can find the Web site for this 6 page PDF below.

https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/files/2021/02/EAST_TX_VEG_PLANTING_GUIDE_20.pdf

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And The Survey Said ...

The Wood County Master Gardeners love their vegetables 92% say they grow vegetables. Most grow in containers or raised beds. Only 5% said they grow enough vegetables to share. Oh my, you must not grow squash.

Most grow from a combination of seeds and transplants. Your favorite vegetable (botanically a fruit) to grow is tomatoes, with peppers coming in a distant second place. Your recommended tomatoes are Porter, Early Girl, HB59, Husky Cherry, Brads Atomic Grape, Chocolate Pear, Celebrity, Big Boy, Texas Tiny Tomato, and Roma. You might want to find a new one from this list to try this growing season.

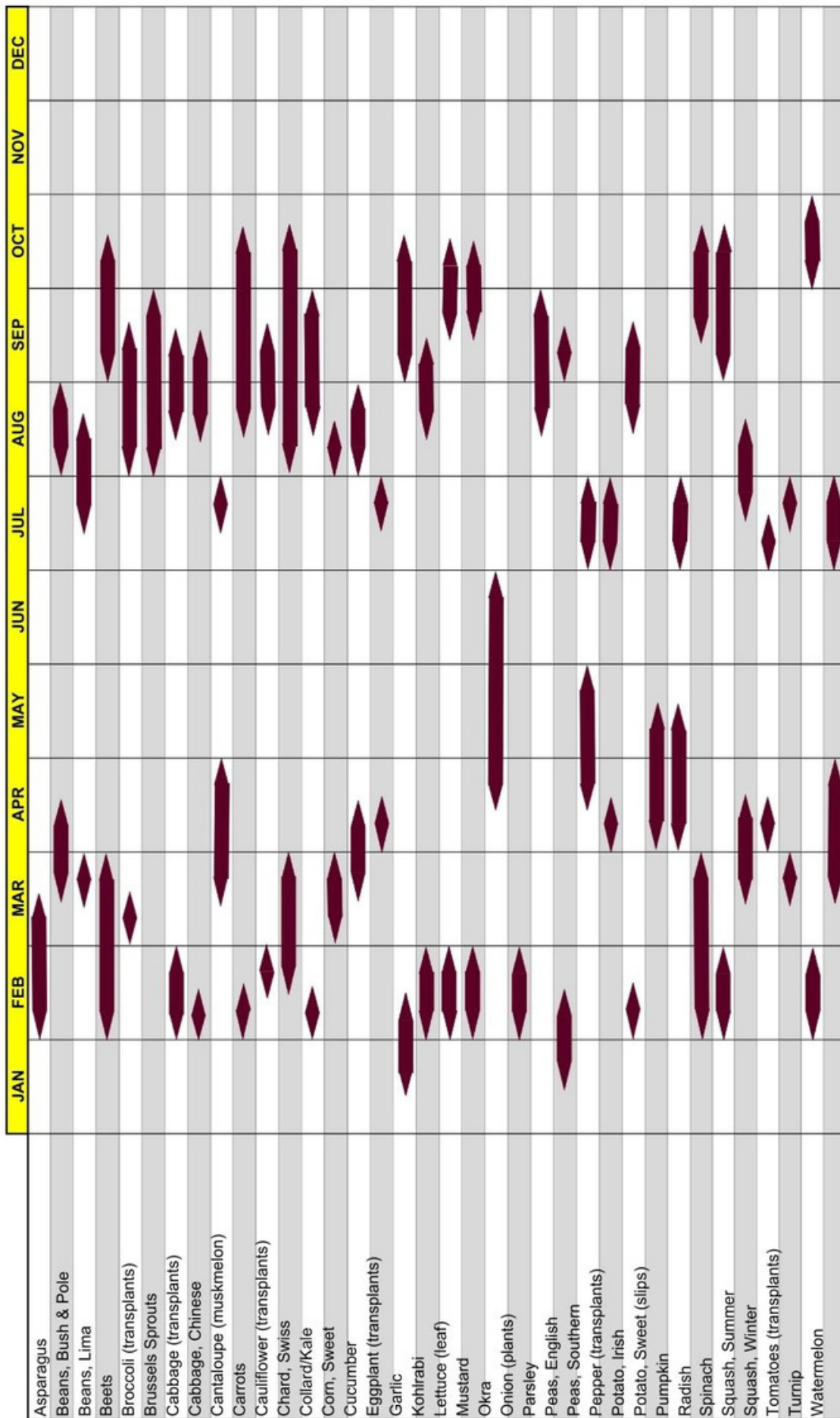
Your favorite source for seeds are harvest your own seeds, seed swaps, and local nurseries. There is a large selection of on-line seed companies to choose from. Ask a fellow WCMG what companies they have had good experience with.

Whatever you choose, it's always a learning endeavor. So start planning your 2026 vegetables and enjoy the learning process.

Digging potatoes is always an adventure, somewhat akin to fishing. There is forever the possibility that the next cast - or the next thrust of the digging fork - will turn up a clunker. Jerome Belanger

Vegetable Garden Planting Guide

for the Tyler Area



Average last spring freeze date 3/15 - Average first fall freeze date 11/15

▲ = optimal time to plant outdoors
◆ = marginal planting time

Plant seed unless otherwise noted

12/20/2013

Compiled by Keith Hansen, Smith County Extension Agent

Vegetable Issue

The following pages will be helpful charts, Web sites for you as you plan your vegetable garden.

Happy gardening!

Web Sites

EVERYTHING TEXANS ASK ABOUT GARDENING

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/09/EHT-055.pdf>

PREPARING THE SOIL FOR YOUR GARDEN

<https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/how-to-prepare-soil-for-a-garden.pdf>

COMPOSTING

<http://www.howtocompost.org/>

<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/s/product/easy-gardening-composting/01t4x000004OfjDAAS>

Planting Guides

https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/files/2021/02/EAST_TX_VEG_PLANTING_GUIDE_20.pdf

https://easttexasgardening.com/resources/tyler_area_vegetable_planting_calendar2.pdf

<https://garden.org/apps/calendar/?q=>

Regular Features

Project Focus

PNW

That's the code for our Master Gardener Phenology project. PNW stands for Phenology NetWork. The code was chosen to reflect our desire to support the citizen scientist part of the USA National Phenology Network (USA-NPN). USA-NPN is one of the most comprehensive nationwide phenology data collection projects. It is a consortium of universities and federal agencies (including the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Parks Service). The group is focused on collecting, organizing and delivering phenological data, information, and forecasts to support natural resource management and decision-making, to advance the scientific field of phenology, and to promote understanding of phenology by a wide range of audiences". (quote from [USA NPN](#) home page) That's a lot of words to say the Network uses citizen scientists or "crowdsourcing" to collect specific phenology information for the scientific community. Phenology is the study of the natural timing of seasonal changes in plants (such as leaf emergence, flowering, and fruiting/seed setting) and animals (such as insect hatches and bird migration), especially in relation to regional weather and climate year after year.

The project we are encouraging participation in is Time To Restore (TTR). TTR covers the states of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. Citizen scientists are gathering data on the timing of flowering and fruiting of plants included on a native plant priority species list. The project seeks to provide better information about native plant nectar availability and seed production timings to help those working on pollinator restoration to better know what to plant and when to best harvest seeds. This data will help those working on pollinator restoration to choose a combination of plants that will provide a wide time window of available nectar for pollinators. Hopefully, over the long-term, data will also show the extent of year-to-year changes in flowering/fruiting timings and show long-term trends.



Two plants data information is being gathered, tall golden rod and American beauty berry

Regular Features

Project Focus Cont

The Texas part of this project has 29 priority plant species, most of which grow in East Texas and many you probably have growing where you live. The four I decided to report on in 2025 were American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), Blackeyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Eastern Redbud (*Cercus canadensis*), and Tall Goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*). You can choose either a single plant or a grouping of the species. With plants like Blackeyed Susans its better to choose a grouping. The plant I originally chose as my specimen plant died after flowering. I now know that this species of *Rudbeckia* is considered a short-lived perennial.

The USA-NPN has developed “Nature’s Notebook” for collecting and submitting your observations. You can download observation sheets to record observations by hand while outdoors, then enter them into your own online “observation deck” later. Or, the way I do it is use “Nature’s Notebook” app for your smartphone or tablet, so you can submit your observations directly from the field.

TTR is very easy to participate in. Log on to Nature’s Notebook at usanpn.org and set up an account. You will need to sign up for TTR so your data will be earmarked for that project The second step is to decide what you will be observing. The first year you may only want to observe 3 or 4 species. The 3rd step is naming your observation place. The plants you choose to observe don’t have to be in your yard. They can be at one of our projects or any public place, but it should be somewhere you will be able to visit at least weekly. I found out its not easy to change the name of your observation site so don’t use an address. More plants and locations can be added to your monitoring at any time. All data is useful. There are no set requirements for how often you need to monitor your chosen plant(s). During the winter, for example, you can make observations less often. When the plant is growing (presenting its various “phenophases”), observations should be made at least weekly. The goal is to record (as closely as possible) the dates of the start/peak/end of flowering and the start/peak/end of fruiting (seed production). The app has information for each different species on the different phenophases. For example, on the redbud one question is “Does it have ripe fruits?” There’s an info circle next to the question that, when clicked on, explains for the Eastern Redbud a fruit is considered ripe when it has turned dark brown.

Regular Features

Project Focus Cont

The internet has completely changed the science of environmental monitoring. The technology you carry in your pocket gives you the opportunity to upload local observations which allow scientists around the world to tap into thousands of observation hours, in many more locations, than they could previously access. In turn, non-scientists (you) become part of a wider community of people who are exploring and helping to answer questions about changes on our earth.



Screen shot of plant list for data collection

Screen shot for data reporting of American beauty berry



Detailed information about the Time To Restore project can be found on their website: <https://usanpn.org/community/TimeToRestore>



Linda Timmons, Phenology Project Director, MG Class 2003

Regular Features

What's Cooking

What could be better on a cold winter day than a hot bowl of soup. Or when you are busy planning your vegetable garden, building new beds, or other gardening tasks being able to throw the ingredients in a crock pot and forgetting it. Enjoy the chicken soup and the hot water cornbread.

Crockpot Chicken Vegetable Soup

Ingredients

2 boneless chicken breast or thighs (whole or diced)

½ tsp salt

¼ tsp black pepper

2 – 3 potatoes diced

2 celery stalks diced

1 large carrot diced

1 medium onion diced

4 cloves garlic finely chopped

1 Bay leaf

6 cups chicken broth

1 cup English peas, fresh or frozen

1 cup green beans, fresh or frozen

Instructions

1. Place the chicken in the crockpot and sprinkle with salt and pepper

2. Add the remaining ingredients and stir

3. Set the cooker on High for 3 hours or Low for 8 hours or until chicken is tender

4. Remove bay leaf and serve.



Nate Holden MG Class 2003

Regular Features

Hot water Cornbread

Ingredients

2 cups yellow cornmeal

2 tsp sugar

1 tsp salt

1 2/3 – 2 cups boiling water

Vegetable oil for frying

Directions

Combine all dry ingredients.

Add boiling water and combine until a very soft dough forms

Form into patties

Fry until golden on both sides (I prefer cast-iron skillet)

This is my mother in-law's (Maxine Bruner) recipe.



Pam Bruner, MG Class 2024

Regular Features

Growing the Love of Gardening

If you ask a Master Gardener, “How did you first get interested in gardening?” you’ll likely hear stories of parents, grandparents, or other special adults who taught them how to dig, plant, and nurture something green. Those early experiences planted more than seeds – they grew a lifelong love of gardening.

Now it’s our turn to share that same joy with the next generation!

This column is dedicated to providing fun, educational activities you can enjoy with the young gardeners in your life.

A Seed Science Adventure

Recently, I had the pleasure of spending an afternoon with three of my grandchildren, ages 2, 6, and 9. Together, we explored the science of seed germination – and discovered that gardening and learning make a perfect pair! Our project was simple but fascinating: testing the germination percentage of vegetable seeds. Each child was fully engaged, and all were successful in completing the activity.

What We Learned

Through this hands-on activity, the young gardeners explored a variety of gardening and educational concepts:

- Cool-season vegetables
- Reading and understanding a seed packet
- Germination and what it means
- Calculating the percentage of germination
- How this information helps gardeners plan seed planting

Supplies Needed

- Assorted seeds (cool-weather vegetables work great)
- Paper towels
- Spray bottle with water
- Quart-size plastic bags
- Pencils, paper, and tape

Regular Features

Growing the Love of Gardening Cont

Step-by-Step Activity

1. Choose the seeds. Each young gardener picked a type of seed to test.
2. Read the seed packet. We discussed the “days to germination” information.
3. Label the test. The children wrote down the seed name and days to germination.
4. Prepare the paper towel. Each child sprayed water on a paper towel.
5. Count the seeds. Each child placed 10 seeds on the towel.
6. Fold and seal. We folded the towel to enclose the seeds and placed it in a plastic bag.
7. Label the bag. The seed information sheet was taped to the outside.
8. Calculate results. After the germination period, we discussed the results and figured what percentage of seeds sprouted.
9. Discuss the findings. We talked about how germination rates help gardeners know how thickly to sow seeds.

Reflections

This simple activity works well with a wide range of ages. Younger gardeners may need a little more hands-on guidance, while older children can work independently — even helping calculate percentages and interpret results.

The older ones especially enjoyed connecting the dots between science, math, and gardening. It was a wonderful reminder that gardening naturally nurtures curiosity, learning, and patience.

Share the Joy!

What gardening activities have you shared with a young gardener?

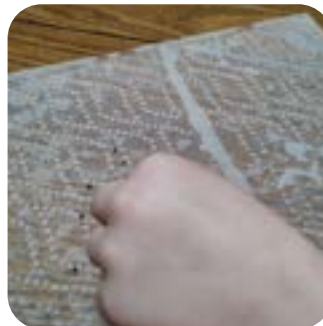
We'd love to feature your ideas in an upcoming issue of our newsletter!

Please send your stories and photos to:

Pam Bruner

brunerp051156@gmail.com

Together, let's keep growing the love of gardening — one young gardener at a time!



Pam Bruner, MG Class 2024

Regular Features

Worth the Read

Have you ever gone someplace and not expecting to find anything pertaining to gardening, but suddenly there it is and you just gotta, have it? Well, that happened to me in August 2025. I went on a sewing retreat, another passion of mine, fully expecting to find something I needed for sewing, but no. I found the gardening book, Month-By-Month What To Do Each Month To Have A Beautiful Garden All Year Gardening In Texas, by Dan Gill and Dale Groom.

The book is written with Texas gardening in mind. The introduction includes Gardening in Texas, Gardening Techniques, Winter Protection, along with a colored map of Texas USDA Cold Hardiness Zones.

Each of the ten chapters covers different types of plants Texas gardeners love in their gardens. For example, chapter one focuses on annuals, chapter five on perennials, and chapter ten on vines, ground covers and ornamental grasses.

Each chapter begins with an introduction of the focus type of plants. Then the authors have included monthly to do list for that group of plants. This includes planning, planting, care of the plants, watering, fertilizing, and possible problems for that month. Included in each chapter are color photographs, “Helpful Hints” charts, and other helpful color charts on the focus plant group.

The final section of the book includes a glossary, pest control options, botanical name index, and common name index. This book was a true treasure of a find for a Texas gardener. I will be using it for years to come as I garden in Wood County.



Pam Bruner, MG Class 2024

Regular Features

Gardening Technique

Gardening Journal

I have a new garden tool. It's a garden journal. As a new Master Gardener, I tried journaling for the first time during the 2025 gardening season. I started slowly with a self-made, digital chart recording information about my seeds.

So, what is a garden journal and how can it be used? A garden journal is a method of recording observations, data, and plans for the future in the garden.

Benefits of Garden Journaling

Tracking Progress

- Document planting dates

- Growth patterns

- Weather conditions

Planning

- Use past results to make informed decisions

- Crop rotations

- Use of garden space

Getting started

Choose your format

Paper - spiral notebook, 3-ring binder, bound notebook

Some garden journal printables can be located at:

Regular Features

Gardening Journal Cont

<https://www.greeninreallife.com/free-garden-journal-page-printables/>

<https://www.onsuttonplace.com/garden-journal-free-digital-download/>

<https://littletruthsstudio.com/pages/garden-planner-journal-download>

Digital – Computer programs, (Excel, Word, etc.), apps for a notebook or smartphone

Or a combination of the two. Choose a format that you will enjoy using.

If you have never journaled about your garden, I recommend you try it this 2026 gardening year. I suggest you start small, choosing one or two elements you want to record about your garden. I plan to add a couple of elements to my journaling this year. I want to include plant locations in my vegetable garden for crop rotation. I also want to record weather conditions.

For more information:

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/appendix-a-garden-journaling>

<https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/how-to-create-a-garden-journal/>

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2073/2014/03/110212.pdf>

<https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-news/take-notes-now-healthier-garden-next-year>



Pam Bruner, MG Class 2024

Regular Features

To Do List For Your Vegetable Garden

January

If you haven't done a soil test in the past 3 years conduct one this month.

Plan what vegetables you want to plant this year and order the seeds.

Begin planning your garden layout. Do you need to rotate any crops?

Review your garden harvest from 2025 garden journal. Did you have enough of one vegetable, not enough, too much? Plan your planting accordingly.

Do you have a new project you want for the 2026 vegetable garden? On warm days work on your project.

Begin planting onion sets

If we have a few warm days, and that's very possible, watch for pest on your cool weather crops.

February

Plant Irish potatoes

Continue working on the list from January, I hope you ordered your seeds in January.

Your selection may be limited but definitely get them ordered this month.

Begin to get your beds ready for spring planting by spreading compost over the soil and mixing in. Then cover with mulch to suppress weeds.

March

Begin planting seeds directly into the ground when danger of frost is over or sooner if you are a gambler. My father-in-law always told me it is safe to plant transplants after Easter. Easter this year is April 5.

Keep the soil moist where the seeds have been planted

Fertilize your onions

Watch for pests

WCMGA

Words From Angela

Dear WCMGA,

As 2025 comes to a close, my time as President of Wood County Master Gardener Association will be complete. Looking back over two years, I accomplished most of my goals as President.

My first goal was to have fun at our meetings! Of course we have business to attend and great programs, but I wanted our meetings to be informal with lots of fun and laughter. I hope you all enjoyed yourselves.

Secondly, I wanted to recognize our members that go above and beyond their due diligence to WCMGA by adding Master Gardener of the Month. We have such great members that work hard and volunteer their time and talents to WCMGA. It was always a hard decision for the Executive Committee to choose just one. I'm glad Master Gardener of the Month will continue on.

My last goal was to organize the function of our Association. The Executive Board began utilizing Google Drive to store documents in an organized fashion in specific folders by year. This eliminated people storing documents etc. on flash drives, or their own personal computers which was a limitation to access and a potential for loss. Secondly, we had a wonderful committee that worked diligently to review and update our Bylaws and Standing Rules. This committee still has work to create a Handbook for WCMGA. Our President Elect has confirmed this committee to continue on in our work for 2026 to see the task to completion.

I want to thank all who have stepped up recently to fill our empty committees and those that have worked faithfully for many years. You all are the backbone of WCMGA. The Executive Committee does so much work with the majority behind the scenes. I am eager to work as an advisor and pleased we have expanded this committee with two at large members. Our CEA, Hilary Grider-Henk has been such a blessing. We were without a CEA for several years, but she hit the ground running and advocates for us all the time. We enter 2026 with a full complement of our committees. We have such a great association because of all of you!

One goal that I did not complete is our Five Year Plan. I will volunteer for this committee when our President Elect forms this committee.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your President for the last two years! I have learned so much and plan to continue working hard beside you to make Wood County Master Gardener Association the best!

Happy Gardening,
Angela Thompson
President 2024 -2025



MG Class '19

WCMGA

Your WCMGA Officers for 2026

**President
VALERIE WILCOX**

I grew up in WI. Our family always had a garden. I learned all about growing and canning veggies. As a kid, I wasn't enamored with the process, but now I am very grateful to have that base knowledge. In WI, gardening was fairly easy. Then we moved to Texas.....

That's where Master Gardeners came into the picture. Diane Schrage saw a flier about the Lunch and Learn programs. We attended a few of those and enjoyed the information. When the training was brought up, we both wanted to attend, even if for different reasons. I wanted to figure out why I was battling so much with the heat and bugs and the soil. I had limited luck, probably more by accident than by intention! Ric and I wanted to eat healthier by preserving what we grew so I needed advice big time! I not only learned a bunch of great information from the class, but there was an added bonus. I found a treasure trove of experiences and advice from all the MG members. This is a great group of people who are so willing to share their knowledge with everyone! I look forward to representing the WCMGA as President. My vision is for us to grow and continue sharing our love of plants with everyone. Come grow with us!



WCMGA

VICE-PRESIDENT LYNETTE WALKER

My name is Lynette Walker, and I am honored to serve as the 2026 Vice President for the Wood County Master Gardeners Association (WCMGA). I grew up in both Lone Oak, Texas and Steamboat Springs, Colorado, experiencing the unique environments and communities of each place. I earned my Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies (BSIS) from Texas A & M-Commerce. I dedicated 23 years to teaching elementary school students, retiring from my career in education in 2021. My passion for learning and leadership has continued through my involvement with the Master Gardeners Association.

As a member of the 2022 Wood County Master Gardeners class, I quickly became active in supporting the organization. In 2023, I was asked to assume the role of chairperson for the membership committee, where I worked to strengthen our community and welcome new members.

In addition, I completed my entomology advanced training certification in 2025, furthering my expertise and commitment to gardening and environmental stewardship.

I also assist in facilitating the WCMG training course, serving as a mentor, presenter, and organizational aide to help guide new members through their education and training.

Gardening is a true passion of mine. I enjoy spending time working in my flowerbeds and greenhouse, as well as growing and caring for a variety of houseplants and vegetables.



WCMGA

SECRETARY
SHELENE JACKSON

My interest began in childhood, helping my mother care for our family's vegetable garden and houseplants—a necessity for our large household. Those early experiences taught me the value of working with the soil and sparked a love for growing food. Later, my aunt Lynne inspired me with her ability to create beautiful, inviting garden spaces, which strengthened my appreciation for both the art and science of gardening.

Becoming a Master Gardener was a natural next step. I wanted to expand my knowledge and give back to the community by sharing what I've learned. Today, I focus on raised-bed vegetable gardening, native plants, and creating pollinator-friendly gardens that support local ecosystems. I am also eager to develop expertise in rainwater collection and conservation.

Outside of gardening, I enjoy reading, exploring great food, and spending time outdoors with my wonderful husband, family, and friends—as well as caring for our lively household of four dogs, one cat, and eighteen chickens. Gardening continues to teach me patience, creativity, and the joy of connecting with nature, and I'm thrilled to be part of this amazing community.



WCMGA

I grew up in a small town in central Louisiana where everyone in our neighborhood had flower and vegetable gardens. As a child, I enjoyed the outdoors and became very familiar with growing tomatoes, okra, and hydrangeas that thrived in the Louisiana soil. My love for gardening stayed with me as I grew older, so when I purchased my first home in the DFW area, I had to adapt to gardening in black clay.

After retiring, we moved to East Texas, and immediately I discovered the presence of sandy soil. We joined the local gardening club to learn more about gardening in this area and were introduced to the Texas Master Gardeners' program. I became a Certified Master Gardener in 2023, and I am currently working on my advanced certification in tree care.

My knowledge of trees, plants, and vegetation has increased through volunteering at the Quitman Arboretum, where I assisted in planting and maintaining plants that thrive in our neck of the woods. Also, I'm part of the revamping of the Mineola Nature Preserve gardens, creating a family friendly environment that can be duplicated in residential yards. Continuing education through the Master Gardeners' program helps keep me informed of our ever-changing growing environment.

I enjoy growing and maintaining native shrubs, wildflowers, and of course, vegetables. Currently, I'm in the process of planting fruit trees.

Gardening has become my favorite pastime, offering relaxation and a sense of accomplishment. Sharing this passion with my wife enables us to connect with our community and beyond.

**MEMBER AT LARGE
NATE HOLDEN**



WCMGA

I fell in love with gardening as a little girl in my Nanny's backyard—she grew everything! When our family moved to Dallas, I lost that garden connection, but in my 20s I rediscovered it through container gardening with annuals.

After retiring and moving here five years ago, I wanted to learn how to grow in our hard red clay soil. In 2023 I found out about Lunch & Learn and attended the sessions with my friend Val Wilcox. In 2024 I completed class and earned my certification.

I'm also a member of the Native Plant Society, Lakes and Pines Chapter, and I'm passionate about natives. I'm currently planting a 15'x7' native pollinator bed built using the Hugelkultur method—it's been settling for eight months, and I can't wait to see it come to life! I'm also planting some natives directly into my soil, wish me luck! Best of all, my husband and I have two wonderful grands, ages 8 and 4, who bring us endless joy. We have them every Saturday with sleepovers!

**MEMBER AT LARGE
DIANE SCHRAGE**



WCMGA

**TREASURER
WANDA TAYLOR**



Links

WCMGA Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/WoodCountyMasterGardeners>

Website

<https://txmg.org/woodcounty/>

Important membership information for returning WCMG members

- Last day for membership dues is January 31, 2026
- 2026 CEU requirements 10 hours report on VMS
- 2026 volunteer requirements 20 hours report on VMS
- Report all VMS hours by 5th of each month. Questions about VMS - contact Linda Timmons



WCMGA

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

January

New Intern Class begins - January 6, 8:30 AM, Wood County Extension Office

Wood County Master Gardener Association meeting - January 15, 9:00 AM, First Assembly of God Church, Quitman

Lunch & Learn - “Ready, Set, Go!, January 22, 12:00 PM, location - First Assembly of God Church, Quitman

Cultivating Curiosity: Seed Swap 2026 - January 31, 10:00-12:00, Bob Wells Nursery at Sorelle Farms, 975 CR 2220, Mineola

February

WCMGA monthly meeting - February 19, 9:00, First Assembly of God Church, Quitman

Fruit & Nut Conference - February 20, St. Louise Baptist Church, Tyler, Contact Wood County Extension Office for more information

Lunch & Learn - February 26, “Love Your Lawn” 12:00 PM, location - First Assembly of God Church, Quitman

Gardening Seminar - “Backyard Blueprint” February 28, 8:30-12:30, First Christian Church, 720 N. Sixth Street, Longview

March

WCMGA monthly meeting - March 19, 9:00, First Assembly of God Church, Quitman

Lunch & Learn “Spring Scaping,” March 26, 12:00 PM, location - First Assembly of God Church, Quitman

Walking Tour of Mineola Nature Preserve With Greg Grant, March 27, Contact Wood County Extension Office for more information

WCMGA

Awards Banquet 2025

Each December, the Wood County Master Gardener Association hosts an Awards Banquet to honor members for their dedication throughout the year. This year's celebration was held on December 18. This page recognizes all award recipients.



**Outgoing vice-president,
Carolyn West MG Class of '20**



**Project Leader of the Year
Nicole Jenkins MG Class
of '23**



**Outreach Project Leader of the Year
Diane Schrage MG Class of '24**



**Innovator of the Year
Angela Thompson MG Class '19**



**Rookie of the Year
Shelene Jackson
MG Class '25**

WCMGA

Service Awards

5 Years



Carolyn West,
Susan Lewis,
Not pictured,
Robert Bauerschmidt

10 Years

Not pictured
Toni Maddin

15 Years



Terri Baker



Master Gardeners of the Year
Nate & Kelly Holden
MG Class '23