

## BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

### Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham  
"The Beautiful Bluebell"

The Bluebell Gentian, one of our most beautiful and showiest wildflowers, is a biennial in our Central Texas area. In colder regions it is an annual. Additional common names are "prairie gentian," "bluebell gentian" or "lisianthus". The scientific name is *Eustoma grandiflorum*, referring to the large flower tube. It is a member of the Gentianaceae family (Gentian Family) rather than the Bluebell Family which is called Campanulaceae.

The plant grows on erect single to sometimes branching stems rising to 3 feet tall. Large gentian-like bell-shaped flowers are up to 2 inches across. The flaring pale to deep purple petal-like lobes bloom in summer from June to Frost. Garden cultivars typically grow 18-30 inches tall and offer a broader range of flower colors including various shades of pink, blue-violet and white. These same colors can occasionally be found in the wild. It is an excellent cut flower, with blooms lasting several days.

The Blue Bell Creamery in Brenham is named for this beautiful wildflower that was once abundant in the fields and along the roadsides near Brenham. Unfortunately, the areas around Brenham (and other areas as well) have been savaged by plant "lovers" who collect the plants for their own use. In some places the Bluebell Gentian is virtually extinct. Therefore, I was surprised and delighted to find a fairly large colony of the Bluebell in a vacant lot south of downtown Killeen on W.S. Young Drive. The photograph was taken there.

The poet Emily Dickinson wrote a poem immortalizing the Gentian:

"God made a little  
Gentian-  
It tried to be a Rose-  
And failed-and all the  
Summer laughed-  
But just before the  
Snows

There rose a Purple  
Creature-  
That ravished all the Hill-  
And Summer hid her Forehead-  
And Mockery-was still"

