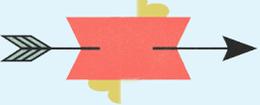




E-Gardening Newsletter

	What to do in November page 2	Winterize Your Garden Tools page 3	My Favorite Tool: The Scythe page 5
Freeze Protecting Your Garden page 6	Over-Wintering Caladium Bulbs page 8	Wildflower of the Month page 8	Ask A Master Gardener page 9



MARK
your
CALENDAR
UPCOMING EVENTS



Ellis County Master Gardeners EXPO

March 25th, 2023

Go Wild with Wildflowers!

Featuring keynote speakers:

John Thomas,
Owner & founder of Wildseed Farms in Fredericksburg

Andrea DeLong-Amaya,
Director of Horticulture from LBJ Wildflower Center in Austin



PLANTING

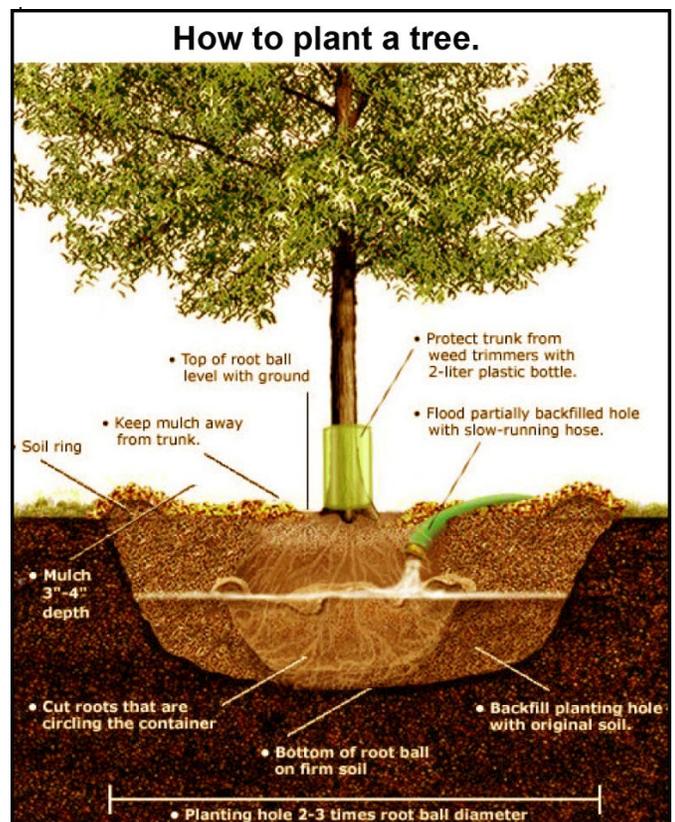
- Now through February is the perfect time to plant container-grown trees and shrubs. Dig a hole two times the diameter and one inch shallower than the root ball. Make sure the root ball and the hole are thoroughly wet before planting. Backfill with existing soil and water well.
- Use the "Custom Tree Selector" at [Texas Tree Selector.tamu.edu](https://TexasTreeSelector.tamu.edu) for help in selecting the right tree for the right location.
- Plant pansies and violas now. Bluebonnets can still be planted from transplants. Daffodils and grape hyacinth may be planted once soil temperature drops below 55°F. Plant 2-3 times as deep as the bulb is tall.

FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

- Feed winter annuals growing in the ground and in outdoor containers with a high-nitrogen, water soluble plant food every two to three weeks. Also feed and water cool-season vegetables that you are growing.
- Remove the tops of herbaceous perennials after they have died. Add 2-3 inches of mulch to the beds to reduce winter weed growth.
- Trim patio plants and hanging baskets before moving indoors for the winter. Locate them near bright windows. Refrain from pruning freeze-damaged woody plants at this time. This pruning is best done in late winter.

GARDEN WATCH

- It's time to winterize! Disconnect hoses from faucets and drain all hose-end sprinklers. Drain fuel from gasoline-powered engines and run the carburetor dry. Greenhouse owners should check the heating and ventilation systems to ensure proper operation.
- Check outdoor potted plants for insects (mealybugs, whiteflies, spider mites, aphids, roaches, ants) before moving inside for the winter. Apply a labeled insecticide if needed.
- When planting new landscapes, select trees shrubs and perennials that are winter hardy in your area. According to the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone map, Ellis County is located in Zone 8 (average lowest annual temperature is 10°-20° F) Therefore, it is best to choose plants listed for Zone 8, or one or two zones to the north (Zone 6 or 7).



WINTERIZE YOUR GARDEN TOOLS

by Jane Slone ECMG

Spring and summer are important days for the gardener and the yard needs you to trim, mow, water and then start all processes over again next week, EVERY WEEK, then....cold. WINTER IS ON THE WAY, BURR!

It is time to think about storing our garden tools before the wintry weather sends us shivering into our homes and out of our gardens. Let us look at the needs of our mechanical helpers: mowers, weed eaters, edgers etc.

Mowers

If you have a gas lawn mower, empty the gas tank by running the lawn mower until all the gas is used up. Or, instead of emptying the fuel tank, a gas stabilizer can be added to prevent the carburetor from becoming gummed. Be sure to follow the directions on the stabilizer. If you leave gas in the mower during winter, it is suggested that you should start the lawnmower several times throughout the winter period. This process will keep gas moving through the carburetor, and it also helps the battery stay charged. Be sure the mower is disconnected from the spark plug (you may need a pair of pliers to remove the spark plug).

Clean underneath and remove all debris that sticks to the blades and bottom of the mower. Clear out grass, sticks, twigs, and mud. Sweep off debris from the top and hose it down to make sure nothing is caked on or stuck in hard-to-reach areas.

Grass can become tangled around the blades and impede the blade. Remove and sharpen the blade to have it ready for next spring. It is a clever idea to oil the blades to prevent any rust from forming.

You have two choices; drain the oil and replace now or leave until spring and change the oil. It is an innovative idea to always leave oil in the engine. Texas has such a mild winter, the choice to change the oil in fall or spring is your option.



Weed Eaters

The air filter should be checked, cleaned, and replaced as needed. It is important to know your weed eater requirements. There are 2 strokes, 4 strokes and walk behind weed eaters. So, the directions could vary for the type of W.E. you own.

If you have a gas-powered W.E., the directions are to drain the old fuel, add fresh fuel, and then use a stabilizer leaving fuel in the tank. This will keep the gaskets from drying out.

You should clean and inspect the weed eater for loose nuts or bolts and items that could prevent it from working next spring.

In one article I researched the owner took his W.E. apart and cleaned it with a toothbrush. He started with the oil and inspection of all parts and cleaned all parts. Most gardeners are not into that much cleaning. Me included.

Clean and check the filter, spark plug and W.E. string or wire. I did learn that it is best to store your gas W.E. horizontal rather than stand it up vertical. The W.E. could be sprayed to protect all metal parts from rusting.





photo: Josh Hersey

Tools: Wood and Metal

All tools should be inspected. Wash each tool with water and soap and allow to dry. Tools with wooden handles should be lightly sanded to remove any splinters. Apply a thin layer of Linseed oil to wooden areas to prevent cracking and drying out.

The tools cannot function at their best if they are dull, so get them ready for spring with sharp edges. If you do not feel comfortable performing this task, have someone with more experience do so.

Sharpening Tools

To sharpen the edges of your tools, put a bit of oil, either WD-40 or motor oil, on the blade. Then with a handheld whetstone, file the blade at a 20-degree angle. You can also use a file or a motorized sharpener, depending on the tool needing sharpening and the equipment on hand.

Tool Storage

Storage can make a substantial difference in your tool's longevity. Storage is so important. I have tried the following storage idea and it is great.

You will need a 5-gallon bucket, a bag of play sand and mineral oil, about 1/2 gallon. Fill the 5-gallon bucket with a bag of play sand and then pour the 1/2 gallon of mineral oil evenly over the top. Let the oil sift through and then push your tools into the sand. The best part of this storage bucket is the coarseness of the sand, which serves as sandpaper keeping debris off the tools. And of course, the oil keeps water from damaging the metal.

Spring will arrive soon, and we will be back to the garden. All your tools will be ready to use for the coming season. So all the money you would have spent on new garden tools can go into buying special plants you just have to have for the garden.

Resources

<https://www.purdue.edu/hla/sites/yardandgarden/prepare-garden-tools-and-equipment-for-winter>

<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/tools-and-equipment/disinfecting-tools.html>

<https://www.purdue.edu/hla/sites/yardandgarden/prepare-garden-tools-and-equipment-for-winter>

<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/tools-and-equipment/disinfecting-tools.html>

[Winter Weather - Preparedness | Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(osha.gov\)](#)

<http://www.marthastewart.com/264239/gardening-tool-care>

[Preparing Garden Equipment And Tools For Winter Storage \(thisismygarden.com\)](#)

<https://www.gardentoolcompany.com/pages/garden-tool-care-and-maintenance>

<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/tools-and-equipment/disinfecting-tools.html>

MY FAVORITE TOOL

Kim Rainey, ECMG

Ginger Cole, Ellis County Master Gardener

Bees don't like
lawnmowers

We met with Ginger at her home in Waxahachie to learn about her favorite tool, a scythe! Ginger prides herself in being willing to try new things in the garden and a few years back she was looking for a way to trim the grass and wildflowers around her beehives. She told us, "Bees **do not** like lawnmowers; they are too noisy and too smelly." In her search for a quieter way to mow the grass around her hives, she found a book, **One Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming** by Masanobu Fukuoka. This book had greatly influenced another farmer, Botan Anderson, who is the owner of One Scythe Revolution, a company in Minnesota that sells European scythes and the tools necessary to keep them sharp. Now, years later Ginger is the happy owner/operator of an Austrian scythe. She says it is her favorite tool and using it is like finding her Zen.



Ginger with her scythe. Look at how well the grass has been mowed!



Photography courtesy
of Josh Hersey, ECMG

Freeze Protecting Your Garden

by Marj McClung, ECMG

In late fall, gardeners begin to prepare for winter when most outdoor gardening slows. Now is the time to prepare for freezing temperatures and to possibly try to get a little longer growing season for our plants. Get in the habit of checking the weather daily to be prepared for freezes.

A light freeze occurs when air temperatures drop to 30-32 degrees F. This sometimes results in frost, when moisture in the air, i.e. dew, accumulates on surfaces and freezes into white ice crystals. This can harm tender plants, turning them brown. The first light freezes generally last only through night or early morning until the air is warmed by the sun.

Vegetables



Protecting with row covers

Prior to a first freeze, gardeners need to harvest tomatoes (green or ripe), cucumbers, hot and sweet peppers, eggplants, beans, okra, basil and fall flowers. Covering plants can possibly protect tender vegetables from a light freeze, keeping them a few degrees above freezing. A week or so longer growing time may result in a little larger produce. Plants must be uncovered during the day to get sunshine and covering is unlikely to work for tender plants when temperatures go below 30 degrees F.

Winter squash and pumpkins are okay to leave in the garden until a hard freeze even though the vines have died. And cabbages, kale, brussels sprouts, broccoli, onions, leeks, scallions, beets and carrots will be okay until a harder freeze.

A hard freeze produces temperatures cold enough to cause ice crystals to form in plant tissues. These crystals pierce plant cell walls, killing the plant. Many plants have some degree of freeze tolerance: the ability of plants to survive ice formation in extracellular tissues without significant damage to membranes or other cell components.

Landscape Plants

Freezes cause our annuals to die off, but other outdoor plants are fine unless there is an extraordinary cold or prolonged freeze.

Finish fall pruning about six weeks before the first freeze date to allow plants time to harden off. Also, finish fertilizing. Fertilizer, especially nitrogen, stimulates new growth which is tender and susceptible to freezing.

If still planting, plant more sensitive or tropical plants in southern exposures and with other plants to act as windbreaks. Try to create microclimates that may be warmer in winter than other areas in your landscape. Finish planting. Plants are better in the ground than in containers. Soil temperatures are warmer longer than air temperatures.

Containers

Move outdoor containers with plants closer to the house, into places sheltered from the wind and to southern exposures if possible. Consider wrapping containers to protect plant roots since soil in a container can get almost as cold as air temperatures.

Bring in tropicals or other plants sensitive to cold temperatures. Some plants are so sensitive they can be harmed even by temperatures cold but not yet freezing. Put these in a greenhouse or near a bright light inside the house or garage. Remember that temperatures in garages often drop below freezing in winter and that light there usually needs to be supplemented by grow lights.

Check plants brought indoors for pests, spiders, tree frogs, geckos or other unwanted guests. Also be aware if any plants brought in are poisonous to pets or children.

If at all possible, consider a greenhouse rather than in the house for container plants since most plants like more light and humidity than we can provide in our homes.



Protecting plant and pot.

For the First Freeze and Bad Freezes

Water a few days before a freeze is due so plants aren't drought-stressed going into cold weather.

Water again just before a freeze. Soil is about 25% water and 25% air. Watering before a freeze displaces air in soil interspaces. Water is slower to cool and water loses heat slowly. Heat lost by the water in the ground around the plants can keep plants a little warmer.

Sprinkling plants to protect from freezes is tricky to get right. Water on leaves tends to freeze and can damage the cell walls of the plants. This method of protecting citrus crops is not usually a good idea for the home gardener.

Mulch or use leaf cover as mulch to keep soil temperature and plant roots warmer. Use mulch or straw in containers also. This protects plants from sudden temperature changes. Be sure water can penetrate mulch.

When the forecast is for very low temperatures or prolonged cold, gardeners can further protect landscape plants that normally survive winter with no problems.

Use outdoor holiday lights around plants or pots to add a bit of heat. Take care when using electricity outdoors since freezes are often accompanied by damp weather. Make sure your lights do emit heat since some newer lights don't.

Cover plants with freeze cloth, a tarp, cardboard box, trash can, plastic tub, or drape the plant down to the soil to take advantage of the soil heat. Secure against wind. Do not drape plastic over plants. Plastic conducts cold. Plastic not touching the plants can be an effective windbreak. Covering plants is protecting against wind and taking advantage of soil heat.

To keep sheets and blankets from crushing plants, use tomato cages to hold the cloth up and clothes pins or office binder clips to attach the cloth to the frames. Secure at the ground with rocks or bricks. Water filled milk jugs absorb heat by day and radiate it out at night, so consider putting these inside your plant tents close to, but not touching the plants.

To protect trees such as palm trees, it is better to drape over the tree in a tent to take advantage of soil heat rather than just wrapping the trunk.



photo courtesy of Josh Hersey, ECMG



Get a Head Start on Spring

Cold frames are like mini unheated greenhouses with a frame and a clear glass or plastic lid. These are useful in early spring to get a head start on vegetables while protecting them from cold weather and late freezes while the plants get used to cooler temperatures and "harden off".



ECMGA calendars are ordered and on their way! These should be at our sponsors by the end of November.



Over-Wintering Caladium Bulbs

While you may find caladium plants for sale in the annuals section of garden centers, they are actually tender perennials that can survive for years with the proper preparation, packing, and storage.

Digging: Dig up your caladiums after temperatures begin to fall--and stay--below 60°F. Use a garden fork or spade shovel to gently lift them out of the ground. Take care to start digging far enough away from the center of the plant so that you don't accidentally cut or damage the bulbs.

Dig up the bulbs *with* the foliage still attached. Don't remove any of the dirt from the roots yet. Allow the plants to dry in a well-ventilated area. After 7 to 10 days, remove leaves and dirt. Discard any damaged or rotted bulbs.

Packing: Packing material for storing your caladium bulbs should be dry, and lightweight enough so that the bulbs can breathe. If not, they may end up molding or rotting. There are a variety of materials you can choose from, including dry peat moss, vermiculite or perlite, sand, or sawdust. Other materials include newspaper and pet bedding pellets. Dust with an all-purpose fungicide such as Captan (Orthocide) as you pack. Try to keep bulbs from touching each other.

Storing Bulbs: Pick a container made of cardboard or paper. Don't use plastic because it will retain moisture. Place container in an area where temperature won't drop below 50°F. Your space should be cool and dry for the bulbs to remain dormant. It's a good idea that the location be on the dark side.



Sources:

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/flowers/CALADIUM.html>

<https://getbusygardening.com/overwintering-caladiums/>

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/bulbs/caladium/caladium-care-in-winter.htm>

Wildflower of the Month

Aster –Sunflower Family (Asteraceae) *Aster ssp.*

Region: 1 through 5, 7 (Ellis County is Region 4)

Size: 1-4 feet

Blooms: August – December, perennial



Melinda Kocian, ECMG



Identifying wild asters by species may be baffling to the amateur naturalist and it often challenges the professional. One authority states that Texas has forty-five species. There are at least six wild blue asters, ranging from blue-white, blue, violet and lavender to purple. The many-petaled flowers range in size from half-inch to two inches. Center disks are yellow. Flowers on the upper stems are profuse. Most asters are fall blooming and an important source of late-season nectar for butterflies. A tea made from cured roots of the plant was used by the Indians to stop diarrhea. Asters can be seen along edges of woods, on prairies and along fence rows, where they grow in clay, sand or gravelly soils.

972-825-5175 ASK A MASTER GARDENER



“I have a Live Oak tree that has some brown substance pushing the bark away. What causes this?”

Answer: This is probably caused by Oak Wilt Disease

Oak Wilt Disease (*Bretziella fagacearum*) is a fungus that is spread by contaminated Nitidulidae bugs (sap beetles) that carry it to fresh wounds in oak trees. The fungus then spreads through the tree's vascular system.

Once the fungus moves into the vascular tissue, the tree reacts by trying to suppress the disease spread by plugging the cells. This, in turn, causes the tree branches to wilt. The diseased tree leaves often have chlorotic (yellow) veins. They eventually turn brown and fall off. Red oak trees sometimes develop fungal mats on their trunks. The mats are hollowed out areas between the trunk and bark that often emit a rotten fruit odor. The disease can spread to surrounding trees through root grafts between trees of the same species.

Red oak trees, such as pin, black and northern red are more susceptible to Oak Wilt than white oak trees such as white, bur and swamp white.

Oak Wilt is one of the most destructive tree diseases in the United States. Central Texas trees have succumbed to this disease in epidemic proportions within the past several years.



Unfortunately, once an oak tree has been infected with Oak Wilt fungus, the tree will almost always die.

It generally cannot be saved, though a treatment of surrounding trees that have not been infected is recommended to prevent further tree loss. That treatment is achieved by injecting the healthy oak tree trunk with Propiconazole 14.3, a systemic fungicide. Infected red oak trees can wilt and die in a matter of weeks. White oaks can survive for a couple of years.



To help prevent the disease, avoid pruning oak trees during the growing season (February-June in North Texas). If pruning is necessary, seal any wounds with latex paint or wound dressing. Cut all grafts when other oaks are near diseased trees. Examine oak firewood for possible signs of disease prior to bringing it to your property.

Suggested Reading:

<https://plantdiseasehandbook.tamu.edu>; <https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2022/04/12/prevent-the-spread-of-oak-wilt-in-texas-this-spring>; <https://texasoakwilt.org>;
<https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/11/16/texans-can-take-steps-to-prevent-spread-of-oak-wilt>

References:

1. Bricault, Bob. [Oak Wilt: Diagnosing and Preventing - MSU Extension](#). Michigan State University Extension, 2014.
2. Juzwik, Jennifer, Thomas C. Harrington, William L. MacDonald, and David M. Appel. 2008. The Origin of *Ceratocystis fagacearum*, the Oak Wilt Fungus. *Annual Review of Phytopathology* 46: 13-26.