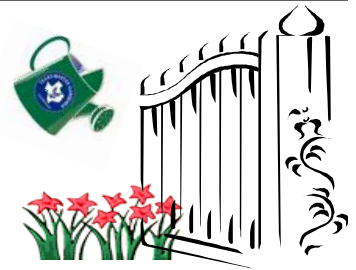




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume III, Issue 11

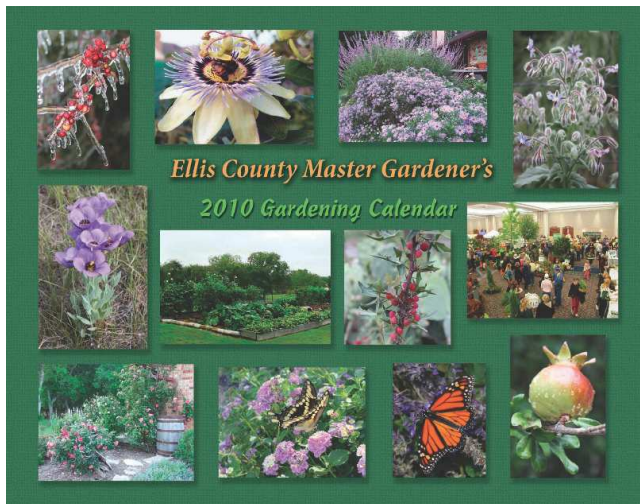
Official E-letter of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association, Waxahachie, Texas

December, 2009

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

Melinda Kocian, editor

## The 2010 Gardening Calendar is Here!



### Listen to KBEC.....

Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. on 1390 AM.

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian

The much awaited 4th annual Ellis County Master Gardener gardening calendar is here and it's...**FREE**...from the following sponsors.

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Vintage Bank  
Travis Equipment  
Waxahachie Daily Light

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**This calendar would not be possible without them!**

## *It's December - What Needs to be Done?*



### *Amaryllis, Apple Blossom*

*From the garden of Lee Dann*

#### **Planting and Sowing**

- Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time in December, from mid- to late-month, if they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to attract birds to your landscape and for winter color. Among your best choices are: yaupon hollies, pyracanthas, mahonias, western soapberries, and junipers.

#### **Fertilizing and Pruning**

- Remove mistletoe from trees with a long-handled pole pruner, as there is no effective spray control. Be sure to do

this before it produces berries, as birds will spread it by carrying the berries to other branches.

- Fertilize recently transplanted trees and shrubs with a high-phosphate root-stimulator during their first year in their new home.
- Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- Plants that produce berries, such as holly and yaupon may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.

#### **This and That**

- Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it in a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.
- Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogs, as well as gardening books.
- Disconnect water hoses and lawn sprinklers to protect them from freezing, but keep them handy for use during occasional winter dry spells.

#### **Garden Watch**

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight freeze-cloth cover, which are available at most nurseries and home centers.

#### **EarthKind™ Tips for December**

Creating a backyard habitat with native and adaptive plants not only benefits wildlife, but is less expensive and reduces maintenance. For more information visit: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildscapes/>.

### **What's Happening In December?**

**Garden Inspirations** is taking applications to be a part of their VIP (Veggies in Partnership) for 2010. Full or half-share programs for fresh vegetables, herbs and flowers. For more info: Marilyn Simmons, 214-497-3918, [marilyn@gardeninspirations-tx.com](mailto:marilyn@gardeninspirations-tx.com).

**Monday, December 7, 4-7pm - Tex-Scapes Greenery** - Celebrate the Season Open House, 2705 S. Kaufman St., Ennis, Texas, (I-45 @ exit 249), 972.875.1716. Everything on sale. Free giveaways and refreshments.

**Saturday, December 19, 9-noon - Cedar Ridge Preserve - Conservation in Action!** Come and join in the fun as we work in the butterfly garden and on the trails, and perform other chores. Water and snacks will be provided. Wear sturdy boots or shoes with good ankle support and bring gloves if you have them though we will also have some available. Bring a friend! 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas 75229. More info: [volunteers@audubondallas.org](mailto:volunteers@audubondallas.org) or 972-709-7784.

**Monday, December 21, 7:00pm - Garden Inspirations** - Christmas Open House, we will have handouts on poinsettias, living Christmas trees, Christmas cactus. Tasty treats and fun holiday ideas. RSVP for the event, the event is **free!** 108 Ridgecrest, Waxahachie, TX 75165, 214-497-3918, [marilyn@gardeninspirations-tx.com](mailto:marilyn@gardeninspirations-tx.com).

## Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

By Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

Hello, and welcome to the December edition of the Vegetable Gardeners Monthly. If you have questions that this article doesn't address, just give us a call at 972-825-5175 or contact us via the web at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) and ask for one of your Master Gardener Vegetable Gardening Specialist.

If we haven't had our first freeze already, keep an eye on the weather and harvest any warm weather vegetables before that first freeze. You can continue to harvest cold weather crops that are still producing, such as lettuce, radishes, broccoli, etc. Cut your asparagus back to slightly below ground level and mulch or compost the plant. Shred your fallen leaves and add them to the compost pile. Be sure and turn your pile and keep it moist. I use this time of year to prepare for my next spring garden. Send in a soil sample for testing and determine how to amend your soil for your next garden. Use this down time to check and modify or repair your irrigation system.

Since there's not a lot of vegetable gardening that occurs this time of the year, I've decided for the next couple of months to discuss some fruit trees rather than vegetables.

### Featured Vegetable of the Month

*By Rick Daniel*

*Ellis County Master Gardener*



#### Trees of the Month

#### FRUIT TREES:

##### APPLE:



**Varieties:** Golden Delicious, Mollie's Delicious, Braeburn, Gala, Granny Smith.

**Culture:** Need well drained healthy soil.

**Fertilizer:** Fertilize three times a year at 20 pounds per 1000 square feet in early spring, early June and at harvest time in the fall.

**Harvest:** Summer through fall, depending upon the variety. Pick and store in dry, cool locations and eat as soon as possible.

**Troubles:** Cotton root rot, brown rot, aphids and various other insect and disease pests. Fire blight can be a problem on some varieties. Building beneficial life in the soil will solve most of those problems.

##### PEAR:



**Varieties:** Orient, Ayers, Kieffer and Moonglow; avoid planting Bartlett

**Culture:** One of the easiest growing fruit trees for Texas. Pears need less pruning than plums and peaches. Removal of the dead and damaged wood is about all that's needed.

**Fertilizer:** Avoid high nitrogen synthetic fertilizer.

**Harvest:** Harvest the fruit when slightly soft to the touch and ripe. Eat as soon as possible or store in a cool dry place.

**Troubles:** Avoid fire blight by cutting back on the nitrogen fertilizer. Insect pests are minimal and can be controlled with citrus sprays.

## Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### December Herb of the Month

#### Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

By Arlene Hamilton, Ellis County Master Gardener



had ginger survive several mild winters.

Although ginger is commonly considered a spice, because of its medicinal properties it is also classified as an herb. In Texas ginger is considered a tender perennial with rhizome roots that will survive winter in south Texas. Here in Ellis County it makes an excellent container plant which can be brought indoors for the winter or moved into the greenhouse. In a sheltered area of the garden I have

Fresh young rhizomes (green ginger) are eaten raw, preserved in syrup, and candied. It can also be used in curries, chutneys, pickles, meat and fish dishes, soups, and marinades. Pickled ginger is used in Japanese cooking, especially to flavor sushi. Dried, ground ginger gives flavor to cakes, muffins, and sauces.

The rhizomes or roots are called 'hands'. These can be purchased from your grocery store's fresh food section for use in the kitchen or for planting in the garden. In selecting fresh ginger for either culinary use or planting, choose a fat, full hand with well-defined eyes. The eyes resemble those of a potato. Start the plant in pots by cutting the root into sections including several eyes in each piece. Lay the roots flat down on loose, rich soil and cover lightly. Once green appears, transplant to a sheltered, semi-shady area in the garden. Ginger plants need a ten-month growing season for optimum rhizome production. The rhizomes will put out roots creating a patch of angular, thin, aromatic leaves in a shady area. Older growths may be removed when new shoots appear. Ginger is a heavy feeder; besides a rich, humus soil, it needs regular fertilizing with a good, all-purpose formula, and regular watering. Ginger will tolerate temperatures in the low 20s. To harvest, dig down to the rhizome carefully and with a sharp knife, cut off a small section. Rinse and use.

Young, fresh rhizomes for cooking will keep for two to three months in the crisper of your refrigerator. Ginger does not freeze well; it becomes stringy and tough. To use fresh ginger, peel the thin skin if you like, then finely chop or grate before adding to recipe.

Medicinally, ginger is considered a warming herb used for motion sickness, and to calm upset stomachs. Dried, ground ginger flavors candy, soft drinks and condiments.

If you want to try a really delicious gingerbread recipe over the holidays visit one of my favorite Texas writers, Susan Wittig Albert at [www.aboutthyme.com](http://www.aboutthyme.com). Her fictional herbalist, China Bayles, owns an herb shop and tea room in Pecan Springs, Texas. China and Ruby serve gingerbread in their tea room and have shared the recipe with the world.

Our family favorite recipe using ginger comes from my husband's mother and has been passed down for many generations.

#### Ginger Molasses Sugar Cookies

3/4 cup salad oil  
1 cup white sugar  
1/4 cup Brer Rabbit Light Molasses  
1 egg  
2 tsp. baking soda  
2 cups flour  
1/2 tsp. ginger  
1 tsp. cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. cloves  
1/2 tsp. salt

Combine oil, sugar, molasses, and egg. Beat well. Sift dry ingredients and add to sugar mixture. Mix well and chill for at least one hour. Form into one-inch balls, roll in granulated sugar and place on a cookie sheet. Bake at 375° degrees for about 10 minutes. Surface of cookies will crack.



## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



**Puccoon** - Borage Family (Boraginaceae)  
*Lithospermum incisum* Lehm.

**Size:** 1 foot

**Blooms:** November - June, Perennial

This little plant is distinctive because of the ruffled edges on the lobes of its bright yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers. The trumpets are sometimes more than an inch long and up to three-fourths of an inch across, in terminal clusters. They produce no seed. Later in the spring or summer, three or four large, white, stone-like seeds are produced by small, self-pollinating flowers hidden in the bracts. A rosette of linear leaves that give rise to the stem usually withers by bloom time, but smaller leaves farther up the stem may be three inches long and are fuzzy, as is the stem. Puccoon root yields a red dye. A tea brewed from this plant was used as birth control in the past, and several hormone-like molecules have been identified from its juices. Puccoon is one of many native herbs being studied for potential medicinal value.



### Applications Now Available for 2010 Master Gardener Training

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association has announced that applications are now available for the 2010 Master Gardener training program.

Texas Master Gardeners are trained members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens.

They are enthusiastic, willing to learn and to help others and are able to communicate with diverse groups of people. The Master Gardener training program equips participants with horticultural knowledge in plant selection, proper planting methods, disease and weed management, ornamental trees and shrubs, plant identification methods, fertilization, water conversation, soil and plant nutrition, pruning methods and much more.

This is a great opportunity for community gardening enthusiasts to gain an increased knowledge in horticulture, improve their gardening skills, and develop a better understanding of the gardening issues Ellis County faces. The program's goal is to develop a pool of well-trained Master Gardeners prepared to serve the residents of Ellis County.

The time commitment is every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the month of February. Additionally, trainees will be asked to complete 75 hours of volunteer service before graduating from the Master Gardener program.

The Master Gardener program offers members numerous methods for obtaining their volunteer hours while serving Ellis County. One such method is through the Junior Master Gardener program.

Application forms are available on the Ellis County Master Gardener's website: [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) or by calling 972.825.5175. Tuition for the program is \$130. Class size is limited and attendance is required at all sessions to complete the program. Deadline for application is January 8, 2010, but classes fill quickly and applications are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.



## Evergreens

By Jackie Wilhite, Ellis County Master Gardener

Evergreens are the focus of a lot of attention during the holidays. No other time of the year do these plants receive so much attention. They are used as Christmas trees, gifts, wreaths, centerpieces and floral arrangements. The aroma of the evergreen fills the air.

Most of the greenery at the holidays comes from spruce, fir, holly or cedar. The official Christmas tree chosen to stand at the White House this year is a blue spruce which is known for the blue cast of its needles. While beautiful for the holidays, the evergreen is a great plant all year round. It is attractive in its native habitat, makes an ideal anchor plant for a new flower bed or gives color to the landscape year round.



Cedar, junipers and pine trees provide a backdrop of green that enhances the display of fall foliage in deep east Texas. The evergreen colors the landscape while other plants and trees are dormant for the winter. Early settlers brought what they could to shade their farmhouses as they settled across the plains of the Texas panhandle. The evergreen provided protection from dust storms as well as much needed shade. Central Texas is also home to a number of cedar and juniper varieties that are underused for landscaping needs. The word evergreen is defined as retaining green leaves all year long. This is the opposite from deciduous, which refers to the plant shedding its leaves when it prepares to go to sleep for the winter. The new leaves seem to push the old leaves off in species such as the live oak. In other words, it does it in such a manner that it will have some new leaves and some mature leaves on the tree at the same time. Other species never lose their leaves.

We usually think of trees when we refer to evergreens but trees are only a small part of the evergreen family. There are a great number of plants used in the landscape that are classified as evergreen. Most of these trees and shrubs are resistant to cotton root rot while the remainder are considered to be resistant. These plants also don't usually suffer from bug or pest invasions. They can be some of the hardiest plants and will be drought tolerant once established.

Some of the most popular medium, small or dwarf shrubs are rosemary, lavender, yucca, palms, agave and oleander. Some of the larger shrubs will include Nellie R. Stevens holly and yaupon holly, ligustrum, Chinese photinia, southern wax myrtle, cherry laurel, Texas sage and boxwood.

Some of the semi-evergreen plants include crossvine, Lady Banks rose, Carolina Jessamine and clematis - (deciduous to semi-evergreen). When planning a new landscape or incorporating new plants into an established site, remember the evergreen will be present with its beautiful color all year long. You don't have to wait until spring for it to return to its majestic beauty.



## It's December, What Else Needs to be Done?

By Carolyn Foster, Ellis County Master Gardener

It seems another year is about to come to a close. Where did it go? Let talk poinsettias, the flower we see most this time of the year. Bracts are the colored portion of the plant and the actual flowers are the yellow centers. Too much green around the bracts means it was shipped immature. Buy plants with dense, plentiful foliage down to the soil line. Lots of green foliage means the plant is in good health.



Choose plants that look balanced from all angles; stiff stems, good bract retention and no signs of wilting, breaking or drooping. Poinsettias need their space for good air flow. Don't allow them to get water logged or the roots will rot.

Place plant in indirect sunlight for at least 6 hours a day. Room temperature should be between 68-70°. Water when soil is dry to touch; fertilize after blooming season.

**Don't** expose to temperatures below 50°F., place near cold draft or too much heat, over water or allow plant to sit in standing water. Fertilize when in bloom.

You can re-bloom poinsettias. In March/April cut back to 8" and fertilize every 2 weeks; continue to water. By the end of May you will see new growth. Place outside for spring and summer. To keep plant bushy, prune in late June. Keep in indirect sunlight. Transplant with lots of organic matter (peat and leaf mold) when needed. Around October 1 plants must get 14 hours of continuous darkness each night. As nights lengthen the plants set buds and produce flowers.

## ***A Gardener's Christmas List***

*By Nancy Fenton*  
Ellis County Master Gardener



It's holiday season again and a good time to talk about some of those items most wanted by your favorite gardener. I purchased for myself this year what is called a Unifork. The chief advantage to this tool is not the bright pink color although it is easy to find even in a dark closet, but the weight. It weighs only 3 pounds! This is an easy to lift fork that is sturdy enough to turn wet compost or shovel heavy mulch. It doesn't dig very well in our hard clay, but my other turning fork doesn't either! It's not available in the stores but can be ordered from [Unionjackstable.com](http://Unionjackstable.com).

I have worn out my popup garden bag and would love to have another one or two (hint, hint!) I did see one at our own Sherwin Williams lately and the larger plant and lumber stores have had them. Gloves and small sharp scissors are always good as are sweatbands and big brimmed hats. The catalogues have finally recognized that there are those of us who garden who are not six foot tall and 180 pounds and are offering several light carts that look like they would carry a lot. I love my wheelbarrow, but it's getting increasingly harder to maneuver it around.

Gift cards to plant places are good as are coupons redeemable for help in the yard and garden. Cleaning out that old garden area would be a great gift since many diseases winter over in the old stems and vines (especially tomato problems!) If your gardener is also a cook, Master Gardeners are selling a new cookbook as we speak; that have some great recipes. We have been trying them out all year!

Speaking of Master Gardeners now is the time to sign up for the February training. Our County Extension Office has the applications and you can call 972.825.5175 to have one sent out. Here's hoping for a great holiday season for you and yours with love, laughter, and lots of garden items under your tree!



### **Mark your calendar!**

The Ellis County Master Gardeners want to invite you to our 10th annual Lawn and Garden Expo. Mark your calendar for Saturday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010, from 9am-5pm. The Expo will be held at the Waxahachie Civic Center. Neil Sperry, will again be our keynote speaker.

Even with the shrinking economy, last March's attendance was well over 3500 paying adults and approximately 400 children who got in free.

So please put this on your calendar. The money we receive goes toward scholarships, community gardens upkeep and educational opportunities for the public.

If you are interested in having a booth at the 2010 Expo, please contact James Kocian: 972-814-0699 or [expo.ecmga@yahoo.com](mailto:expo.ecmga@yahoo.com).



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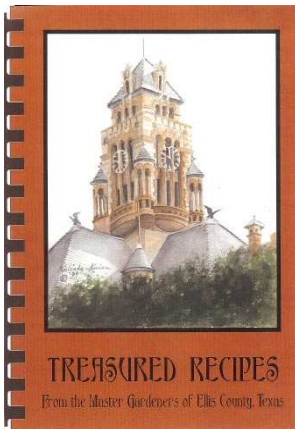
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**Ellis County Master Gardener's Cookbook**  
**Only \$10.00**  
(beautifully hardbound - 450 recipes)

Now that the Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market is over until May 2010, the cookbooks can now be purchased at:

The Greenery, Waxahachie  
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*Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Year!*