



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume III, Issue 3

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

April, 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

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**We Couldn't  
Have Done It  
Without You!**

**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

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↑ vendors



↑ Children's area



← Master Gardener Plant Sales

## What's Happening in April?

### Lighthouse for Learning

with the Ellis County Master Gardeners

For reservations call 972-923-4631, Extension 142

**Monday, April 6, 6:00-7:30** - *Greenhouse Management*, **Instructor: Walt Friis**, \$10.00.

Considering buying or building your own hobby greenhouse? Learn the basics of greenhouse management, starting with choice of site, design, heating, cooling, lighting and watering needs.

**Monday, April 20, 6:00-7:30** - *Irrigation and Water Saving Tips*, **Instructor: James Bell**, \$10.00. Come learn how to use sprinkler systems and save money. You can have a green lawn without spending so much money. Come and learn what's new in sprinkler systems. Also learn what a drip system can do for your flower beds and shrubs.

**Mondays, April 20-May 11** - (four classes) "*Ag 101*" - *Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners, Session A*, **Instructor: Mark Arnold**, \$20.00. Join this experienced instructor as you cover topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management.

**Monday, April 27, 6:00-7:30** - *Energy Efficient Living*, **Instructor: Pam Daniel**, \$10.00.

Homeowners wanting to conserve energy and save on bills are looking for ways to improve efficiency and comfort. This presentation provides an overview of value added options and alternatives that can make a difference to you.

**Monday, May 4, 6:00-7:30** - *Grow-Anything Soils*, **Instructor: Nancy Fenton**, \$10.00.

This class will concentrate on getting the soil right for special plants.

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**Wednesday, April 1, 7:00 a.m. Cedar Ridge Preserve** - "*Black-Capped Vireo Census Begins*". Are you interested in restoring **Black-capped Vireos** in Dallas? Dr. Marcy Brown Marsden of the University of Dallas begins the fifth annual **Black-capped Vireo** census at Cedar Ridge Preserve. Volunteers are needed for upcoming conservation/research activities related to **Black-capped Vireo** restoration at the preserve. The work includes bird surveying to assess whether vireos are present at the preserve, and to help detect other nesting species at the preserve. Bird surveys will take place every Wednesday and Friday, with occasional Saturdays through the end of May. Volunteers meet at 7:00 AM in the Visitor Center for a brief overview and training (and coffee). Surveys last about 2 hours. Dates are listed below:

Dates: April 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, May 1, 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27, 29

Location: Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas 75249

Information and to RSVP: 214-492-9409, [biomarcy@winwaed.com](mailto:biomarcy@winwaed.com) for more info.

**Saturday, April 4, 9:30, Petal Pushers, Cedar Hill.** "*Mid-Season Veggies and Companion Planting*". The 5th class in a series of on-going **free** vegetable gardening classes. Using herbs as food, plant buddies and plant enemies. Make gardening easier and more rewarding and enhance the flavor of everything.

**Saturday and Sunday, April 4-5, 1:00 p.m., Weston Gardens**, 8101 Anglin Dr., Ft. Worth, 817-572-0549, [www.westongardens.com](http://www.westongardens.com). *Succulents, Agaves and Yuccas*. In this seminar, explore how to successfully incorporate them into the garden. There are so many great plants that you haven't even begun to try!

**Thursday, April 9, 7:00 p.m.**, at **The Greenery**, Waxahachie. "*Landscaping with Herbs*". Presented by Marilyn Simmons. Marilyn has worked at The Greenery for 10 years. She raises all of her own organic vegetable and herbs. For more info, call 214-497-3918. Free to the public!

**Monday, April 20, 7:00 p.m., The Green Thumb Organic Club** presents "*Edible Flowers*" by Arlene Hamilton. Arlene has been an Ellis County Master Gardener and is a graduate from the class of 2000. Arlene will be assisted by Chef Jerri McGinty. Jerri will be preparing a few recipes using edible flowers. Plan to come early and visit Marilyn Simmon's beautiful organic gardens. This class is free and the public is welcome. 108 Ridge Crest, (Rockett). Call 214-497-3518 for more info.

**Sunday, April 12, Easter in the Gardens!** Weston Gardens, 8101 Anglin Dr., Ft. Worth, 817-572-0549. Special live music, bring a decorated Easter Egg; receive a free 4" plant, Special Easter Tea Tastings-\$10 per person, prepaid. Call for info or [www.westongardens.com](http://www.westongardens.com).

**Friday, May 1 - 6th Annual: The Dallas Arboretum's Annual Plant Sale & Class** (Jimmy Turner's class "**Lone Star Greats**". May 1, 4-5:30 p.m., \$22.00 or (\$20.00 for members). To register for this or other classes, call 214-515-6540.

Plant Sale Preview: Friday, May 1, members and class attendees only

Plant Sale Open: Saturday, May 2, from 8:00 am-6:00 pm (sale open to the public and free of charge on Saturday, May 2nd).  
Sunday, May 3rd, from 8:00 am-12:00 p.m.

*It's April - What Needs to be Done?*



**Bluebonnets**  
from the garden of Pam Daniel



Fall bluebonnet

- Sow herbs directly into beds with very well-draining soil, hanging baskets or patio containers.

**Pruning and Fertilizing**

- Frequent mowing will keep an established lawn thick and healthy, but avoid removing more than one-third of the leaf surface each time.
- Prune rubbing, damaged or low-hanging branches from shade trees. To avoid disease problems with your oaks, wait until mid-summer or mid-winter to prune them, if possible.

**Garden Watch**

- Check tender, new growth for aphids. A few can be tolerated, but large numbers should be controlled. Dislodging them with a fairly strong spray of water may be all the control you need until the ladybugs move in. If chemical pesticides are called for, follow label instructions carefully.
- Eliminate fire ants in your landscape by broadcasting a labeled bait while temperatures are between 70 and 90 degrees. Follow label directions closely to achieve best results. Individual mounds that are located in problem areas such as near house foundations, garden beds, and high-traffic areas can be eliminated by using a labeled mound drench. Contact your County AgriLife Office for more information.

**Planting and Sowing**

- Start new turf from sod. Be certain that you have good root-to-soil contact and keep the new sod evenly moist until new roots are established.
- Plant warm-season annuals. Best for full sun (6 or more hours of sun per day): moss rose, purslane, pentas, cosmos, zinnias, marigolds, amaranthus and celosia. For shade (less than 4 hours of sun per day): coleus, caladiums, impatiens, and green-leaf begonias. Keep seeded area moist until germination. Thin seedlings to recommended spacing soon after the first true leaves have appeared.
- Corn can be sown early this month, but only after the soil temperature has reached 65°F. Hot-weather vegetables (okra, black-eyed peas, watermelons) can be sown mid- to late-month.

EarthKind™ Tips for March

Is your landscape contributing to a healthy and sustainable environment? There is one way to find out; just take the EarthKind™ Challenge. It's easy. Just answer a series of questions about the cultural principles and practices used in maintaining your landscape. [http://horticulture.tamu.edu/EKQuiz/ekchallenge\\_mg/](http://horticulture.tamu.edu/EKQuiz/ekchallenge_mg/).

More pictures on page 8 →

Keynote speaker: Neil Sperry



Kids Workshop



Master Gardener Plant Sales



Vendor setup ↑





## Vitex, *angus-castus* and the Color Purple

By Scotty Rigsby Ellis County Master Gardener

So, you like the color purple. You're passionate about your plants. You want more excitement in your flowerbeds? Consider *Vitex angus-castus*, also known as *chaste tree*. It is probably called chaste tree to keep the passion this tree exudes under control. Another alias describing this tree is "lavender tree", reflecting the aromatic leaves. Whatever you call it, it's worth considering in your landscape. Hardy to zone seven, it will work well in our area, enjoying full sun and adapt-



able to our soils.

*Vitex* is basically a large shrub, that with age, when pruned from the ground up, will easily take on the shape and beauty of a multi-trunked accent tree. It can reach a height of 18 feet and a width of almost the same. It will need room to grow and spread out in your landscape.

It is an old-fashioned plant, often found in older neighborhoods, that is experiencing renewed interest by gardeners for its durability and drought tolerance. It is listed as a low water usage plant by the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association. It is deciduous, losing its olive-green five-parted leaves in the winter.

Blooms are erect and quite showy, similar to lavender or lilac colored blooms of a sage or salvia. It blooms in late spring and early summer. According to Neil Sperry, Texas A&M researchers have recommended pruning immediately after spring blooming to stimulate a second round of flowers in the summer or fall. Other varieties of different colors are available such as *alba*, white flowers; *rosea*, pink flowers; and *silver spire*, vigorous white flowers.

It is best used as a fast growing ornamental or accent tree and will definitely make a statement by being noticed in your landscape. Just be sure to control your passion for this plant.

For further information, contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners at the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 701 S. I-35 E., Suite 3, Waxahachie or call 972-825-5175 or email [www.ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:www.ellis-tx@tamu.edu).

## Did You Know?

Gardeners Can Help Reduce Global Warming....

By Betty Reuscher,  
Ellis County Master Gardener

As gardeners we can "talk the talk and walk the walk." Here are some practical suggestions for gardeners to help reduce global warming. The Complete Gardeners Guide to Global Warming can be found at [www.nwf.org/gardenersguide](http://www.nwf.org/gardenersguide).



1. Eliminate invasive species and add a variety of native plants. Global warming will allow non-native plants and animals to out-compete native species. Higher average temperatures and changes in precipitation patterns will encourage problematic species such as kudzu, garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, and Japanese honeysuckle to encroach into new areas.
2. Change watering habits. Severe heat waves and droughts may cause a reduction in water sources and lake levels. There are a number of ways to reduce water consumption in your garden including mulching, installing rain barrels, watering only in the morning and evening, and using drip irrigation.
3. Compost kitchen and garden waste. Methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas, leaches from landfills contributing to global warming. Composting locally also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers that pollute water supplies and take energy to produce.
4. Plant trees around your house. Trees shield your home from the elements, reduce energy use for air conditioning and heating, absorb and store carbon dioxide which is responsible for global warming. A tree can remove a ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in its lifetime.
5. Start a rain garden. Properly placed gardens can reduce water pollution and runoff from heavy downpours. Gardens can capture storm water and help prevent it from entering local lakes and streams.
6. Reduce the use of gasoline-powered yard tools. Avoid using lawn mowers, weed eaters, and leaf blowers. Use electric-powered or human-powered tools such as push mowers, hand clippers, and rakes. Replacing lawn areas with low maintenance native plants or wildflowers will help.
7. Promote energy efficiency. Replace regular outdoor light bulbs with compact fluorescents, install automatic light timers and purchase solar-powered garden items. Gardeners can have a positive effect by encouraging local stores to stock these items.
8. Encourage local officials to implement strong action plans to combat global warming.

## Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

By Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

Hello, and welcome to the April 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 Specialists.

Our vegetable plants are usually grouped as cool, warm and hot season vegetables. It is past time for cool season vegetables and mid-April would be almost too late for warm season vegetables. Finish planting warm season vegetables by mid-April (beans, cucumbers, cantaloupe, peppers, pumpkins, radish, sweet corn and squash) and plant hot season vegetables (okra, black-eyed peas and watermelons) mid- to late-month.

### Featured Vegetable of the Month

By Rick Daniel  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### Vegetable of the Month

#### PEPPERS:



**Planting dates:** After all danger of frost and soil has thoroughly warmed, usually about 2 weeks after tomatoes are planted. Like tomatoes, peppers do best when transplanted. Peppers need to mature and produce while nighttime temperatures are above 60° degrees and daytime temperatures are below 80° degrees. When temperatures are outside of this range, peppers tend to shed their blooms and most fruit produced will be small. Most varieties completely stop fruiting when temperatures get above 90° degrees. Exposure to temperatures in the low 40's for even a short period of time may stunt peppers, reducing their harvest. Probably best to replace transplants if concerned they may be stunted, as they will not recover. The best method to determine when to transplant your peppers is to measure soil temperatures about two inches below the surface. When you have three consecutive days with soil temperatures above 55° degrees, that is the ideal time to plant. For fall crops, need to plant about 100 days before first expected freeze date. Probably best to protect from weather for a few weeks after planting, in both the spring and summer.

**Planting methods:** Peppers transplant easily and that is the most common method, 18-24 inches apart. The best transplants are about 7-8 weeks old, 5-6 inches tall and have good foliage free of any obvious disease. At planting time, the soil should be slightly moist. Pour about one cup of starter solution in each hole. Deep planting should be avoided. Water thoroughly and protect from the weather for a few weeks.

**Varieties:** The amount of capsaicin in a pepper determines how hot they are. This can be scientifically measured as Scoville units. Peppers can vary greatly in the amount of heat they generate when eaten. The bell pepper has a Scoville rating of 0, while the hottest pepper, the Naga Jolokia, has a rating of about 1 million Scoville units. If you want to know the rating of the peppers you are considering planting, you can Google Scoville scale and get the answers. I usually plant a combination of sweet, mild and hot peppers, to have the right pepper for most occasions.

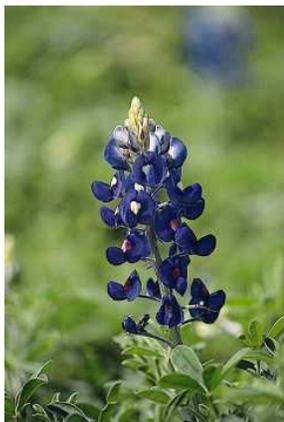
**Culture:** Easy to grow in most any healthy soil. Use lots of compost and organic material, and mulch heavily. Peppers do best when planted on raised, well drained beds, as they like to have warm feet and don't do well with wet feet. When you water is more important than how you water. Avoid letting soil dry enough to cause plants to wilt. May need to water about twice a week if Mother Nature doesn't provide needed water. Must be grown in full sun, with well drained soil and needs lots of attention. Peppers do best with soil pH is between 5.5 and 7.5

**Fertilizer:** Use about one cup of starter solution for transplants and side dress cautiously after first fruit sets. Too much fertilizer can cause excessive vegetative growth, while too little at first bloom can stunt growth. Very sensitive to fertilizer, need it in small doses only at bloom time. Use about half a handful of organic fertilizer per plant or side dress with about 2 tablespoons of ammonium sulfate or 1.5 tablespoons of ammonium nitrate in a circle around each plant.

**Harvest:** Don't break peppers from plant. Cut them off. Some recommend cutting off the first set of peppers to stimulate faster production. Can pull up entire plant and hang in garage at first freeze. Most peppers will turn colors (yellow, red, purple, etc), when they are fully mature, but can be harvested when green.

## Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



*Lupinus texensis* Hook  
**Legume Family (Fabaceae)**

### Texas Bluebonnet

**Average planting success with this species:** 60%

**Height:** 12-24 inches

**Germination:** 15-75 days

**Blooming period:** March-May

**Suggested use:** Raised flower beds, half wooden barrels, hanging baskets, mixtures, hillsides, roadsides and meadows.

**Miscellaneous:** Easy to grow from seed providing you do not have an overabundance of rainfall and plant in well-drained soils.

Spring visitors to Texas are wide-eyed at the beauty of fields and roadsides carpeted with the state flower, the bluebonnet. Sandyland bluebonnet (*L. subcarnosus*), perhaps misidentified at the time, was adopted in 1901 as the official state flower, but in 1971 it was decided to make all bluebonnets naturally occurring in Texas, the state flower. Bluebonnets are identified by their palmately divided, or hand-shaped, leaves and pea-type flowers, close clustered in an elongated inflorescence, or raceme, at the tips of stems. The petals are blue or purple, and occasionally pink or white (Texas A&M has created a maroon one). Texas bluebonnet (pictured) and Sandyland bluebonnet are the only two species restricted to Texas, with Texas bluebonnet the most widespread. Sandyland bluebonnet is more likely to be seen in the eastern part of the state. In far west Texas, the Big Bend bluebonnet (*L. havardii*) makes a stunning display in the early spring of favorable years.

## Herb of the Month

*By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



### Bay Laurel *Laurus nobilis*

*By Arlene Hamilton, Ellis County master gardener*

**B**ay Laurel or Sweet Bay is an aromatic evergreen tree or large shrub reaching 20+ feet tall, native to the Mediterranean region. Chosen by the International Herb Society for Herb of the year 2009, bay is semi hardy in this part of Texas. A mature plant can survive to about 15° in a protected area of the landscape. Plant bay on a sunny south east exposure near a building or wall for best protection from harsh north winds. Bay Laurel will tolerate some high shade and can suffer damage from too much direct Texas summer sun.

Bay leaves are used for their flavor in cooking. The fragrance is sweet but not overpowering with a blend of spices such as nutmeg and clove. These scents are followed by a hint of citrus and mint. One or two bay leaves make an excellent seasoning for poultry, fish and meat, and enhance the taste of any stew, soup or sauce. It is an important ingredient in many French, Moroccan and Turkish dishes. The peak of bay's aroma is a day or two after picking the fresh leaves. This brief drying time concentrates the oils just enough. Bay leaves should be used whole and removed from the dish before serving. Chopped leaves have very sharp edges and must be enclosed in a muslin bag. Add fresh bay leaves early in the cooking process



(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

to release the most flavor - unlike most herbs, bay can be boiled for hours.

Bay Laurel gets its name from the Latin *Laurus* meaning green tree and *nobilis* meaning noble or renowned. A wreath of bay laurels was given as the prize at the Python Games because the games were in honor of Apollo. Greek mythology holds that the nymph Daphne was transformed by the river god Ladonas into the laurel tree to escape the pursuit of Apollo. In the bible the sweet bay is often an emblem of prosperity and fame. It is the source of the word *baccalaureate* and *poet laureate*.

A classic use of bay is the French *bouquet garni* which is a bundle of the three herbs bay leaf, thyme and parsley tied together. The herbs can be tied with a string or placed in a muslin bag so that they can be removed from the pot before serving. Generally the herbs are fresh but can be dried.

Here is a wonderful use of bay to flavor cakes, pie filling or drizzled over all types of baked goods, fruits and fruit salads. This also makes a wonderful sorbet.

### **Bay Syrup**

1 1/2 cups water, 1 1/2 cups sugar, 10 to 12 bay leaves. Combine the water and sugar in a small saucepan. Add the bay leaves and bruise them gently against the side of the pan with a spoon. Place over medium heat and bring to a boil. Cover, remove from the heat and let come to room temperature. Remove the leaves and press to extract their flavor. Can be refrigerated for about 10 days or frozen for up to 6 months.

Some additional uses for bay leaves are:

- Add a couple of leaves to the water for cooking pasta, potatoes and rice.
- Poaching liquids for fish and poultry are richer with a few bay leaves added.
- Fresh bay leaves and juniper berries are the two major flavorings in marinades for game meats. A good way to get that flavor combination is to steep some leaves in gin for a few weeks and add the liquid to the rest of the marinade ingredients.
- Add two leaves to Italian-style sauces, pot roasts and other braised meat dishes.
- Simmer a leaf in the warm milk mixture for custards and puddings.
- Use bay leaf to flavor hot chocolate.
- Add a bay leaf to canisters of flour, cornmeal and other grains to prevent weevils.

Be aware that not all bays are edible. Be sure you are using *Laurus nobilis*.



## **Raised Bed Gardening**

By J.R. McMahan,

Ellis County Master Gardener 2009 Intern

Northern states may have more cold and ice but you can till a garden right into the rich brown earth in most of them. Not so in our area of North Texas where the ground is made of clay. Raised bed gardens are a good way to create planting beds in our primarily clay soils. A raised



bed garden is an area built up on all four sides allowing the soil to be above regular ground level but contained by sides.

Raised beds can be any length, but a width of 3-4 feet allows the gardener to be able to reach into the center of the bed from both sides and not have to step into the bed which compacts the soil. A wider bed will need a path of stepping stones or similar material. Sides can be made of any sturdy material that will hold up to outdoor weather conditions. Landscape timbers can be stacked several high and secured with rebar rods by holes drilled through the timbers. Landscape blocks can be stacked to form decorative curves, and if stacked 2-3 feet high, can create a raised bed that requires little bending over! Garden-ready bed kits are also available and include bed sides and connector pieces that fit together forming squares or rectangles. These are usually made out of recycled plastics.

North Texas clay soils makes raised beds a good alternative for planting directly in the ground. Raised beds allow the soil in each bed to be prepared specifically to the plants being grown there. The height of the bed sides is not as important as the soil preparation. A bed with sides less than 8-10 inches high should have the ground soil tilled and amended as much as possible before adding the raised bed soil so plants in the raised bed can grow their roots down far enough. Another advantage to having raised beds is the sun warms the soil more quickly in the springtime and some seeds and transplants can be started sooner in the warmer soil. One of the best advantages to having a raised bed garden is better water drainage. A raised bed allows water to drain down and away from the plant roots. When plant roots sit in water too long, the roots are deprived of much needed oxygen and continuously wet conditions can weaken the plant making it more susceptible to disease and pests.

A healthy plant is a happy plant and happy plants love raised beds where they can grow and thrive in nutrient rich soil, warmer soil, and most importantly, good draining soil.

# GARDEN TALK

By Homer McCain,  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Looking for something different? Try these plants.

As a long time gardener, I am always looking for new plants that I have never grown before. That's why I tried two selections that we grew in the greenhouse and sold at the Master Gardener plant sale during the Lawn and Garden Expo in 2008. I planted both of them in a large glazed container in March of last year. I must admit that I had never heard of Orange Peel Cestrum (*Cestrum* 'Orange Peel'). I discovered that it's a fast growing, woody perennial that likes full sun and can grow up to 6 feet tall. In fact, it behaves more like a flowering shrub except that it blooms continuously from early spring until the first freeze when it drops its leaves during the winter. It has clusters of tubular, yellow-orange flowers on the end of the stems and needs no dead heading. In a container it grew only about three feet high—a manageable size.



Cestrum and Dwarf Gaillard



Lantana, cestrum, Gaillardia

I partnered it with another perennial that I had seen, but had never grown, called Dwarf Gaillardia (*Gaillardia* *ssp.*); not to be confused with gaillardia, the annual wild flower. It is also known as "blanket flower" or "fire wheel". It takes full sun, grows about 12 inches high with soft, downy evergreen leaves that seem to cascade over the rim of the container. Its red flowers with yellow tips and a reddish-brown cone in the center clearly reveal that it belongs to the aster family. Like Orange Peel Cestrum, it blooms throughout the spring into winter. The two plants provide an interesting contrast in both form and texture. I added a third plant to the mix, a purple trailing lantana (*Lantana montevidensis*) which draped over the side of the container as it grew. All of these plants can be grown in the ground given full sun, adequate moisture, and good drainage. The soil should be amended with organic matter and expanded shale (if you can afford it). The dwarf gaillardia can be grown from seed; however, I got poor germination in doing so and only two plants germinated. I recommend it be purchased as a transplant.

The plants performed extremely well in my garden the past year. They survived the winter in the same container which was located with a southern exposure. The cestrum leafed out and was blooming by late March of this year, and the dwarf gaillardia was blooming by the first of March. And, as a bonus, both plants attract the three B's (birds, bees, and butterflies). I am really satisfied with these two plants and look forward to another season enjoying them. As a gardener, what more could you want!



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## EXTRA! EXTRA! WEED ALL ABOUT IT.



By Joan Brammer, Master Gardener Intern

Spring is just around the corner and gardeners, both seasoned and not so seasoned, dream of lush lawns and beautiful beds filled with their favorite flowers. Winter brown starts to turn to green...but wait...is that green color we see out our kitchen window a weed? What do we do?

The best thing is not to let the lawn weeds grow. Adequate fertilizer, water, mowing and precautionary measures prevent the growth of lawn weeds **and** eliminate insects, disease and soil compaction. Every wrongdoing last summer comes back to haunt you two-fold this spring. Control is now the answer. Grab your hat and sunscreen before you start.

### Control

There are basically two types of weed-control. The simplest one is to take the weeds out by hand or use your favorite garden tool. Before digging up those dandelions, grab your phone and dial 1-800-CHINA. Ask them to let go of those pesky taproots! You'll have to dig again if you leave any in the ground.

If the area is too large, you may need to use an herbicide. When applying herbicide you need to follow the prescribed quantity and time of application found on the product label. Reading the label is the most important piece of advice any gardener can follow.

### Herbicides

To kill weeds in your lawn there are two types of herbicides. Pre-emergent herbicides prevent the weed seeds from germinating. They should be applied before seeds germinate. Generally they are applied during late February or early March.

If the problem of lawn weeds exist in the spring, post-emergent herbicide may be necessary. Post-emergent herbicides are manufactured as two different types: selective or non-selective. Selective herbicides work on a specific species of plants such as broad-leaf plants (net-like veins and showy flower) without harming your grass plants (hollow, rounded stems and parallel veins). Non-selective herbicides work on any plant they touch.

### Weed types

Crabgrass, goosegrass, sandbur, and dallisgrass are the major types of grassy weeds. The first three weeds are annuals that emerge from seed each spring. Dallisgrass is a perennial grass that comes from rhizomes but also produces seed that spread the weed all over the lawn. Crabgrass, goosegrass, and sandbur can be controlled with pre-emergent herbicide in early spring. Dallisgrass must be treated with the post-emergent herbicide. Choose one that is specific for the type lawn you have.

Cool season weeds such as ryegrass, weedy grass or rescue grass can be controlled with pre-emergent herbicide applied in early fall or by post emergent herbicide applied when your permanent lawn is dormant.

Broadleaf weeds such as dandelion, chickweed, henbit, clover can be controlled with selective post-emergent herbicides. Again, choose one that is specific for the type lawn you have.

Nutgrass is difficult to control and will spread rapidly. Hand weeding is one control for this weed. The tuber or bulb of an emerged shoot must be removed. One missed tuber will maintain the infestation and another weeding cycle will be required. There are many selective post emergent herbicides that can be used effectively to control nutgrass in warm-season turf grasses. Herbicide applications are most effective when applied to nutgrass plants having at least three to eight leaves. Choose one that is specific for the type lawn you have.

Please contact your Extension office for specific weed questions; 972-825-5175 and ask to speak to a Master Gardener

**Q** flower's appeal is in the contradiction - so delicate in form yet strong in fragrance, so small in size yet big in beauty, so short in life yet long on effect.

~ Adabella Radici

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

By Mindy Phillips,  
Ellis County Master Gardener



The first of April is usually warmer than we expect. Trees and spring flowers are in full bloom, nurseries are bursting with flowering plants, shrubs, and trees and everyone wants to be outside. This is the month your winter and early spring work begins to pay off and you can enjoy the lawn and garden.

The typical last freeze date of mid-March is past and by mid-April it is safe to plant any frost tender vegetables or flowers in our area.

Lawn care gets into full swing this month. Fertilize with a slow release nitrogen when grass is growing, not just greening up. If you didn't fertilize in March, do it now and water it in thoroughly. Keep fertilizer pellets off your drive and sidewalk as they may discolor and the runoff can damage our water supplies. Check your sprinkler system to be sure that combined rainfall and sprinkler watering provides an inch of water a week. We often overwater. This makes grasses shallow rooted and more prone to heat damage when summer's intense heat arrives in May or June. Water deeply and as infrequently as your lawn can handle.

Mowers that mulch the cut grass are a great way to get double benefit from your fertilizing efforts. The fertilizer is spread on the grass and gets to the ground. Then when the grass grows, the cuttings contain nitrogen and get mulched back into the lawn for a second round of nutrients. Remember to only cut 1/3 off each mowing for best results.

If weeds are the major part of your lawn at this time, consider using a broadleaf weed killer produce or pull the weeds out. Mowing and hot weather will take care of the annual lawn weeds, but those perennial weeds need a tougher hand to get them out of your lawn. Please follow label directions exactly and discard empty containers as per directions.

Wildflowers are in full bloom most years by the second week in April. Bluebonnets, Indian paintbrushes, and lots of other native wildflowers grace our fields, highways and yards. If you seeded bluebonnets last fall, you should be enjoying the full show by now. Remember to leave the seed pods on the plants until they dry up and open, spilling their seeds for next year's show. If you didn't get wildflower seeds in this year, the correct time to plant is September-October. Wildflowers don't need much to be happy – poorer soil and drier land suit them just fine. If seeds are very tiny – like poppy seeds – mix them with sand or flour before sowing. Be sure to tamp the earth down over the seeds when you plant so they get good soil contact.

Remember, these plants grow wild so don't over water or over fertilize – they will do much better with a little neglect once planted. Seeds from this year will germinate next spring for the next year of blooms.

Daylilies are a great low-water use plant. The variety of sizes, colors and bloom times are amazing. You can select early mid or late summer blooming daylilies and have a show all summer long. After 3-5 years they will need to be separated and planted in more areas or shared with gardener friends as they get crowded and won't bloom as well.

Irises are another low water use perennial that can provide year long garden interest. Again, bloom seasons can be from early

spring to late May if you select different varieties that bloom early, mid and late in their season. Irises come in colors from white to black with pale pinks to dark purples in between. Fancy varieties have two tone petals as well.

The Ellis county Master Gardeners are ready to answer your questions or provide additional information. Call 972 875 5175 or email at ECMGA.com.

Just after mid-month, April brings us two gardening holidays to observe: On April 22, the world celebrates Earth Day. This holiday helps us consider global health, ecologically sound practices, and water wise gardening. Using native and adapted plants for our gardens means less insect problems, less water use, and generally better looking landscapes. Over 60% of local water use in the summer months is for landscape watering. When you plant a new shrub, flower or tree, think how it would survive and grow if you couldn't water it at all. Hopefully we will not have water restrictions that stringent, but it is still good practice to select plant materials with that dire scenario in mind. Once low water use plants and trees are established, they could survive with very little water and provide much needed shade and color during dry times. All plants need more water the first couple of years to get established, but low water use plants can survive on much less watering once their roots are fully established. Nurseries and the master gardeners will be happy to advise you on plant and tree selections that will require less water when you are ready to plant.

A second April holiday in our area is Arbor Day. This traditionally across the nation is tree planting time, but in our north Texas climate February would have been better. You can plant any container grown plant in any month of the year, but the hot summer months are the hardest time for new plants and trees to get root systems established and deal with the serious water loss of the over 100° degree days we so often have from May through September. If you do plant a tree now, be sure to water it deeply each week

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until frost, then twice a month in the winter months, then the same schedule again the second summer to get a good root base established. Selecting native and adapted trees is also a good idea for the long term.

About the end of April, bugs become a problem in many lawns and gardens. Warm, humid weather brings out the insects and fungus as well as the flowers. If your roses are showing black spots on the leaves, it indicates a fungus problem called, logically enough, black spot. Treatment with systemic or topical fungicides is indicated. Watering should only be done in the morning so any dampness on the foliage can evaporate before cooler nighttime temperatures when fungus thrives on wet leaves.

If tiny pale green to whitish insects are devouring the new buds and growth on your roses, you probably have aphids. Try spraying them off your roses with a strong spray of water from the hose, covering the top and underside of the leaves thoroughly. If this doesn't work after several tries, you may need an insecticide. Follow label directions exactly and dispose of empty containers as per the instructions on the package.

There are some natural predators for the problem insects we encounter in the lawn and garden. Lady bugs eat aphids. These can be bought from nurseries and released in cool parts of the day. Birds help eat bothersome insects, also, so provide a hospitable yard to encourage birds to spend time in your area. Birds need a fresh water source like a birdbath, hiding places in shrubs and tree branches, and a cat free area for safety. Native plants are helpful here, too, as natural plant life has been feeding the wildlife for centuries before we came on the scene.

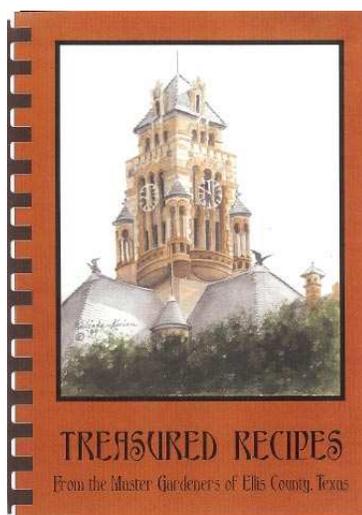
Some insect damage can be tolerated for most gardeners. Overuse of chemical insecticides should be avoided and use of natural predators and physical removal such as water sprays and bird and ladybug foraging is easier on the environment and your pocket book.

Weather by the end of April can be unpredictable, but summer is not far away. Getting your lawn and landscape ready for the hot months ahead will yield you an easier summer of gardening and help your plants and trees prosper even in the harsh conditions our summers usually bring.

Mulching all bare ground is a great practice and it will provide several benefits. First, mulch keeps weed seeds from getting enough light to germinate if it is at least 3" deep. Mulch also helps regulate the temperature of the soil, keeping it cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter months. Mulch will also help retain moisture in the soil and allow you to water less and have the water you do provide do more good for your plants.

There are lots of types of mulch. The inorganic variety of mulch can be gravel, rubber, or plastic. Organic mulch comes from nature and will eventually decompose and add nutrients to the soil. Hardwood mulches, such as pine bark, cypress and cedar, put a layer of protection between bare soil and wind and heat. Cedar mulch has the added advantage of being an insect deterrent. Mulch can be obtained in 2-3 cubic foot bags from nurseries and discount stores or in bulk from local sand, gravel and soil businesses. Either way, using a 3+ inch layer of mulch on all your flowerbeds and trees will enrich your soil and conserve water. It is one of the easiest gardening practices to make your work easier and your plants and trees happier.

Continue to water deeply and thoroughly one inch per week. If you have runoff water before the inch can be applied, try two shorter periods of watering so all the water can be absorbed by the soil rather than running down the street. Remember rainfall and watering should be added together to provide that inch per week.



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