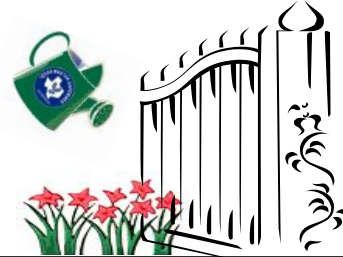




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume X, Issue Four

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

April, 2017

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 with your landscape. We will feature horticultural articles that we hope you will find interesting, and 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 and click on subscribe. Best of all; it's FREE! Susan Clark, Editor

What's Happening in April?

Every Saturday from April to October from 8am-1pm.

410 S. Rogers (across from City Hall in the old lumberyard building)
Visit the Master Gardeners' Booth!

- ☺ Useful gardening tips
- ☺ Plants and herbs for sale
- ☺ Free handouts...Some items for a fee
- ☺ Tell a friend to sign up for the **E-Garden Newsletter**... it's **FREE**!



Spring has sprung and the start of the 2017 Downtown Farmers Market is upon us! April 22 is opening day for the market. The Farmers Market offers lots of fresh produce and plants. There are also many vendors with fresh baked goods, jams and jellies, cheese, salsas, herbs and on and on.

We have lots of new and exciting events planned. Event coordinators, Arlene and Cheryl, have put together a schedule of weekly programs and themes with something new every week. See page nine for the details. The Master Naturalists and Junior Master Gardeners will again lead the Kid's Activities the second Saturday of each month. Monty and his team of volunteers will bring the Pop-Up Horticulture program the third Saturday monthly. Check our website at www.ecmga.com to see the schedule. Click the "What's Happening" link and then "Pop-Up Horticulture". The fourth Saturday will feature our Market Chefs with seasonal samplings of market fare.

Back by popular demand, the Great Iris Give-Away will take place August 19. Our annual Grill Festival is planned for July 22 and we have added a Chili Cook-off competition for October 7. It's going to be a great season and we look forward to seeing you at the Market!



Listen to KBEC

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

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a five 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



Indian Trail Master Naturalists Events

Join the **Indian Trail Master Naturalists** at their monthly meeting on **Monday, April 24**. The program for the evening is entitled "**Forest Types of North Central Texas**" with **Suzanne Tuttle**.

Suzanne Tuttle is a plant ecologist who recently retired after a 23 year career at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Biology from UT Arlington and an Associate of Applied Science degree in Horticulture from Tarrant County Junior College (now TCC). She is currently serving on the Boards of Directors for the Native Plant Society of Texas, the Fort Worth Chapter of the Native Prairies Association of Texas and the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute located in Fort Davis, TX.

Suzanne's presentation will cover the Eastern and Western Cross Timbers, forested riparian areas of the Blackland, and Fort Worth Prairies and Urban Forests. The program is free and follows the 6 p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. Meeting location: First United Methodist Church, Family Life Center 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu

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The Texas Redbud is a small, deciduous tree reaching a height of 15-20 feet and a width of 15-20 feet. The Texas Redbud will tolerate full to partial sun with medium water requirements.

This Texas native produces pink to magenta flowers in early spring with attractive seed pods to follow. The Texas Redbud can be short lived, often due to stem cankers.

It's April....What Needs To Be Done?

Planting

- ☼ Plant warm-season annual flowers. For sun (six+ hours per day): angelonias, copper plants, firebush, lantana, moss rose, purslane, pentas, ornamental sweet potatoes, and zinnias. For shade (less than four hours per day): begonias, coleus, impatiens, and perilla. Select short, compact plants.
- ☼ Plant okra and southern peas (black-eyed peas, etc). Squash, cucumbers and melons can still be planted.
- ☼ Many herbs can also be planted from transplants (for example: dill, parsley, fennel, mint, oregano, and thyme).
- ☼ Now is the best time to plant Bermudagrass and St. Augustine grass sod. Grade and smooth area prior to installing sod to ensure good soil contact. Keep moist until roots are established.
- ☼ Seeded varieties of Bermudagrass may be sown starting mid-month. Keep soil moist until seed germinate and grass has established a good root system.
- ☼ Select caladium tubers now, while ample stocks are available, for May planting.

Pruning and Fertilizing

- ☼ Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to established lawns. Use product containing at least half of their nitrogen in slow-release form.
- ☼ Mow common Bermudagrass at 1½ inches and St. Augustine grass at 2½ inches. Frequent mowing will keep an established lawn thick and healthy, but avoid removing more than one-third of the leaf surface each time.
- ☼ Fertilize roses every four to six weeks from now to September. Start with a balanced fertilizer, then apply ammonium sulfate or other high-nitrogen fertilizer as new growth appears following a flowering cycle.

Garden Watch

- ☼ Check new plant growth for aphids. A few can be tolerated, but large numbers should be controlled. Washing them off with a strong spray of water may be all that is necessary for adequate control.
- ☼ Eliminate fire ants in your landscape by broadcasting labeled bait while

temperatures are between 70 and 90 degrees. If fire ants are still present after using bait, treat the individual mounds with appropriate insecticide. Contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Ellis County at (972) 825-5175 for more information.

- ☼ Watch for rose rosette virus. New growth on diseased roses exhibit elongated/enlarged canes, reddish leaves and stems, and excessive thorns. Remove and destroy infected plants and roots immediately. There is no control for this fatal disease.
- ☼ Soil purchased for use in beds, low areas, and containers should be examined closely. Often, nutsedge and other weeds are brought into the yard through contaminated soil sources.
- ☼ Watch newspapers and other media for information regarding wild-flower trails, garden tours, and plant sales.



**Interested in becoming a
2017 Expo Sponsor Or
Expo Exhibitor?**

Contact James Kocian at
expo.ecmga@yahoo.com

Reserve the date: March 24, 2018!

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Larkspur—Buttercup Family (Ranunculaceae)
Delphinium carolinianum Walt.

Region: 1-7 and 10
Size: 1-3 feet
Blooms: April through June, Perennial

Larkspur is easily distinguished by the “spur” that extends back from the base of the upper sepal, presumably the Lark’s spur. The other four sepals have the usual petal form. Larkspur’s color can range from white through all shades of blue to blue-violet. Flowers, few to several, open upward along the solitary stem, forming an inflorescence several inches long.

The annual larkspur of gardens, *D. ajacis*, has escaped cultivation and is often found growing wild, but is not a native wild-flower. Leaves of larkspur are alternate, deeply palmate-lobed and one to two inches wide. A tincture of larkspur was an old-fashioned, but reliable standby to kill body lice, but can cause a rash. This is not surprising; all parts of the plant are poisonous.

THE ELLIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES ITS

1st Annual Spring Garden Tour

Saturday, May 6, 2017 • 9am-4pm

Tickets available
for purchase at
each tour site.

\$10 adult

\$3 children
(18 and under)

**\$5 military or
seniors**

We invite you to stroll lush landscapes and private gardens of Ellis County. Unique plants, trees, groundcovers and garden artifacts are sure to delight. Our garden tour homes are located in Waxahachie, Midlothian, Ovilla and Palmer. Ellis County Master Gardeners will be available at each home for questions and conversations.

Event will happen rain or shine.

For more information on the Ellis County Master Gardener Association (ECMGA) Spring Garden Tour, please contact:
Mattie Thompson (214) 315-4373 • Shelia Cloonen (214) 837-9716 • Kathy Graves (972) 489-5507

Mints

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



If you planted mint last year, your mint patch should be producing beautiful, flavorful, green leaves by now. Although mints die back in our hot summers, they will reemerge early in the spring, well before the last frost date. Mints will grow with wild abandon all spring and into early summer when they will try to flower and then die back. Pollinating bees love the flowers, so be careful while harvesting.

Most mints need to be harvested often, otherwise they will bloom and the leaves will be spaced farther and farther apart on the stems. Flavor is lost if flowering is allowed, so get out into your mint patch, pick a bunch, and brew up a tall glass of refreshing mint tea to enjoy as you take a break from all that gardening.

Mints belong to the genus *Mentha* in the *Lamiaceae* family. They are very aromatic plants with four-sided stems, opposite leaves, and small flowers in purple, pink, or white. Most mints do not produce seeds, or the seeds are not true to the mother plant.

Mints spread by rhizomes and prefer loose, well-drained soil. These perennials grow beautifully and develop their best flavor in morning sun and afternoon shade in the Texas garden.

Mints prefer more moisture than most culinary herbs, so be prepared to water faithfully during our summer droughts. A light feeding is desirable, but not too much fertilizer or you will have lush growth, but not much flavor.

Mints make great container plants. In the garden, mints should be controlled with metal, plastic, or wooden barriers, but expect some of the rhizomes to break through and spread throughout the garden. Thanks to mints' promiscuous ways and the variability of their offspring, as many as 2,000 different varieties have evolved from about 25 distinct flavors.

Mint Varieties

Mints are divided into two broad groups, according to fragrance: the peppermints (*M. piperita*) and the spearmints

(*Mentha spicata*). The spearmint family does best in the Texas garden. Following are my favorites and a few to try in your herb garden.

Crispata (*M. spicata*) is the one smelling most like Wrigley's Spearmint gum. With its sharp, clean aroma and dark green, curly leaves, it is excellent for lamb mint sauce.

Variegata (*M. suaveolens*) is a beautiful creamy-white and soft green pineapple mint. Elegant to grow and use fresh, it loses much flavor when dried.

Hillary's Sweet Lemon named for former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, is a hybrid of apple and lime mint.



Orange Mints (*M. aquatica* or *M. citrate*) are decorative in the garden, best in the early spring. Use to make a refreshing iced tea. The flavors of orange mints are too perfume-like to use in cooking, but the leaves make good potpourri.



Chocolate (*M. xpiperita*) is one of my favorites. It has a slight and delicious flavor of chocolate, especially when the leaves are candied.

And my very favorite, 'use in everything' basic spearmint is Kentucky Colonel. Yes, it's the one preferred in mint juleps on Derby Day.

If you don't already have mint in your landscape, pick a few varieties to try out this year. Mints are easy to grow and you'll enjoy

Here is a delicious summer recipe to try.

WHITE GRAPE & MINT SALSA

4 cups seedless white grapes (green grapes)

2 tbs. onion chives, chopped

Juice of 1/2 fresh lime

2 tbs. spearmint, chopped

1 whole jalapeno, seeded and diced

Combine ingredients in food processor and barely pulse or chop by hand.

Mix and refrigerate at least one hour.

Serve with chips or top on grilled fish.

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR APRIL

By Dr. William C. Welch, Extension Horticulturist, Texas A&M University, Texas

- ✿ Pruning of spring flowering shrubs should be done soon after flowering. Keep the natural shape of the plant in mind as you prune and avoid excessive cutting except where necessary to control size.
- ✿ Remove spent flowers, trim back excessive growth, and apply fertilizer to established annual and perennial plantings.
- ✿ As soon as azaleas have finished flowering, apply an acid-type fertilizer at the rate recommended. Don't over-fertilize, as azalea roots are near the surface and damage can occur. Water thoroughly after fertilizing. Splitting the recommended amount into three applications two weeks apart works well.
- ✿ Seeds of amaranth, celosia, cosmos, marigold, portulaca, zinnia, and other warm season annuals can be sown directly in the beds where they are to grow. Keep seeded areas moist until seeds germinate. Thin out as soon as large enough to transplant. Surplus plants can be transplanted to other areas.
- ✿ For instant color, purchase started annual plants. Select short, compact plants.
- ✿ Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clip and storing in a sealed glass jar in your refrigerator until needed.
- ✿ Start weeding early in the flower garden. Early competition with small plants can delay flowering. A mulch will discourage weed growth and make those that do come through easier to pull.
- ✿ Soil purchased for use in beds, low areas, and containers should be examined closely. Often nut grass, other weeds, nematodes, and soil-borne diseases are brought into the

yard through contaminated soil sources.

- ✿ Watch the media for information regarding wildflower trails and plan to take a short trip to enjoy them at their prime.
- ✿ Turn the material in your compost pile to speed up decomposition. Water when needed.

✿ Select caladium tubers while there are ample stocks available. Early May is the best time to plant caladium tubers for most areas of Texas. Caladiums are warm climate plants and will not grow until soil temperature is at least 70 degrees or higher. They prefer moist, shaded, well drained soils. Plant so the top of the tuber is from 1 1/2 to 2 inches deep and 12 to 18 inches apart.

✿ Plant Southern peas, okra, peppers and other warm season vegetables after soil temperatures have warmed in your area.



Expo Highlights!



Expo Highlights!

Children's Workshop

The Children's Workshop Room enjoyed a second year in the light filled Crape Myrtle Room. The larger space allowed us to spread out with returning favorites and welcome some new friends. Children of all ages enjoyed crafts, activities, interesting critters and each child received a goody bag with live plants for planting at home. Parents and adults were able to talk with exhibitors and receive information on topics of interest. Thank you to everyone who helps make the Children's Workshop Room a huge success!



And the winners are...!

Every year, the Ellis County Master Gardeners award the vendors for their creativity and informational booths. This year the three judges awarded five awards.

**Most Impressive Large Booth
The Greenery**



**Most Innovative Large Booth
Earth Tones**

**Most Impressive Small Booth
Gardenscapes By Diane**



**Most Creative Small Booth
Vineyard Elite**



**Most Outstanding Booth
Berlin Gardens**





Each Saturday 8am-1pm
April 22 through October 28

*Fresh Produce • Farm Eggs
Baked Goods • Jams & Jellies
Meats • Handmade Wares*

410 S. Rogers 469-309-4111

*Applications and information
available at www.waxahachie.com*

April 22: Grand Opening & Growing Green by Master Gardeners
April 29: Spring Time at the Market
May 6: Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
May 13: Kids Activity & Ellis County Farm Bureau Breakfast
May 20: Container Gardening
May 27: Market Chefs: Seasonal veggies with homemade dips
June 3: What's Baking at the Market
June 10: Kids Activity
June 17: Tool Maintenance
June 24: Market Chefs: Sweet & Savory Muffins
July 1: Power of Peppers
July 8: Kids Activity
July 15: Irrigation
July 22: Master Gardeners' Grill Fest
July 29: Crafty Crafters
August 5: Melon Madness
August 12: Kids Activity
August 19: Iris Give Away and Care
August 26: Market Chefs: The Goodness of Grains
September 2: The Intriguing Life of Bees
September 9: Kids Activity
September 16: Texas Super Stars
September 23: Market Chefs: Brining, Fermenting & Pickling
September 30: Autumn Décor & Festivities
October 7: Chili Cook Off
October 14: Kids Activity
October 21: Fall Gardening
October 28: Market Chefs: Sweet Potato Surprise



Eclectic Gardening

With Jane Slone, Ellis County Master Gardener

THIS MONTH:

Snakes in the Garden



This is not a subject that you would commonly read about in a gardening article, but it is important to understand both the benefits and potential dangers of snakes. If you are ever bitten and are not sure if the snake was venomous, get immediate medical attention.

I do not like snakes. I'm not sure why, because all other critters are welcome in my yard. However, when I see a snake, I panic. As much as I have tried to overcome this aversion, I can't seem to get over it. I am trying to see the good of these creatures and learn how to coexist with the legless critters.

As a gardener, I need to learn to live with all animals in the gardens. Some are very beneficial and some may not be that helpful. The bunnies that eat my vegetables are cute, so I overlook their ravaging. But snakes, what do they do for my garden?

So I decided that we all need to look at snakes...see the good and bad, and determine how to identify venomous from the non-venomous so that we can peacefully co-exist! What have I learned from my research?

CHARACTERISTICS OF SNAKES

Snakes are elongated, legless, carnivorous reptiles of the sub-order *Serpentes*.

Snakes can be distinguished from legless lizards by their lack of eyelids and external ears.

There are over 2,000 different kinds of snakes.

All snakes hunt prey to eat.

Some are poisonous (which can be a hazard to the gardener).

They hunt with their senses, using their nose, tongue, or sense of touch.

Snakes find their food with a keen sense of smell and the ability to feel the body heat of another animal.

They hibernate underground in the winter.

They are cold-blooded reptiles.

They must lie in the sun to keep warm.

They shed their skin as they grow.

In North Texas, there is a combination of non-venomous and venomous snakes. Those that are venomous are divided into two basic groups: pit vipers and coral snakes. We need to be aware of three basic pit viper groups: rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, and copperheads.

Your library or an internet search can provide you with a list of characteristics to identify the venomous from the non-venomous. Just remember that you usually have to be very

close to determine the different characteristics.

BENEFITS OF SNAKES

Snakes can actually benefit your garden. They'll eat slugs and Japanese Beetles. Texas A & M extension states, "Both as adults and as white grubs (the larval stage), Japanese beetles are destructive plant pests. Adult beetles feed on the foliage and fruits of several hundred species of fruit trees, ornamental trees, shrubs, vines, and field and vegetable crops."



Beyond insects, some snakes will eat small rodents that might otherwise feed on your flowers and veggies.

Snakes don't chew or damage the landscape in any way. No plants are harmed by snakes, either from being eaten or from their physical presence moving through them. All snakes will avoid the gardener, if possible. They are non-aggressive creatures. We do not have species of snakes in the United States that will purposefully attack humans. They will bite if

stepped on, picked up, forced into a corner, or threatened. However, they would much rather get away than risk a fight, just as we would.

WHY DON'T WE WANT SNAKES?

A disadvantage of having snakes in your garden is that they will bite if you accidentally disturb them and they don't have an easy exit. Many snakes that we find in the garden are not venomous, but if you are bitten you need to know what type of snake bit you and seek medical attention.

As long as a particular snake isn't poisonous, it's usually best to just leave it alone. It will move on once the food supply in your garden is exhausted.

HOW TO IDENTIFY VENOMOUS SNAKES

Look at the head. Most venomous snakes have triangular shaped heads.

Observe the colors. Some venomous snakes such as the coral snake have bright colors.

Look into their eyes. Some venomous snakes have vertical eye slits, versus round pupils usually seen in non-venomous snakes.

Look for a pit between the snake's eyes and nostrils. A venomous snake normally has a heat-sensitive pit there to locate warm-blooded prey. Non-venomous snakes lack such pits.

See if there is a rattle. A snake with a rattle on its tail is the venomous rattlesnake.

(Continued on page 11)



Eclectic Gardening (Continued from page 10)

Notice the underside scales on the tip of the tail. Most venomous snakes have one row of scales there while non-venomous snakes usually have two rows.

Check the bottom of the tail if you can. The bottom of the tail of venomous snakes looks the same as the rest of the belly. If the snake has a cross pattern (like a diamond shape), it is non-venomous. However, this may not be easy to figure out, unless the snake is dead.

Watch water snakes swim. Only venomous water snakes swim with their entire bodies visible on the water.

Examine the bite marks in case of a snake attack. Two close-set puncture marks would indicate that the snake has fangs and is venomous. By contrast, a ragged bite mark means the snake lacks fangs, which only non-venomous snakes have.

In summary, when you are not sure if a snake is venomous, just assume it is and stay away! Remember that they are just as afraid of you as you are of them, and they only attack if they feel threatened. They are beneficial in many ways to our gardens, so whenever possible leave them be, to live and let live.



COPPERHEAD



RATTLESNAKE



COTTONMOUTH



Find us on:
facebook®

Are you a Facebooker? You should be! Ellis County Master Gardeners are on Facebook and we'd love to have you join us. Check in to find out where and when our local events will be held—events like the Downtown Waxahachie Farmer's Market or Lighthouse for Learning Classes. Drop by our page after an event to see pictures.

Use our page as your point of contact to ask us gardening questions or get information about flowers, vegetables and herbs...we cover it all! Some of the recent articles posted include Neil Sperry's advice regarding rose rosette disease, a new Texas Superstar, Balsamic Blooms basil, the "two-step" method for controlling fire ants and updates on local events that gardeners will find interesting and educational. You can also post pictures and let us know what is happening in your gardens and landscape.



You'll find us at this link, and all you have to do is click the "Like" button to see our daily posts! We look forward to hearing from you with questions and comments. If you have a QR Code reader on your smartphone, you can scan our code and be taken directly to our Facebook page.

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

Save The Date!
Saturday, March 24, 2018



Thank You All!

Thanks to the sponsors, exhibitors and visitors for making the
2017 Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn & Garden Expo
a great success!

Gold



Bronze



Green

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Renewal by Andersen ♦ Roland's Nursery & Landscape
Tex-Scapes Greenery ♦ Texas Tree Farm

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Barris Pottery & Ceramics
Best Bug Bait
Bertha's Best
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Boyce Feed & Grain
Brazos Valley Equipment
Brim Seed
Brookside Landscape & Tree Service
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We couldn't do it without your support!