



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VI, Issue 3

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

April, 2012

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, click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE! Melinda Kocian, editor/Susan Clark, co-editor

2012 Ellis County Master Gardener
12 Annual Lawn & Garden Expo
And the Winners Are: (drum roll, please)

133 Exhibitor booths (most ever)
filled Waxahachie Civic Center to capacity!



Listen to KBEC.....

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

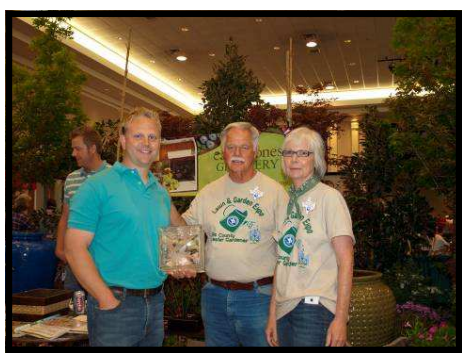
The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian



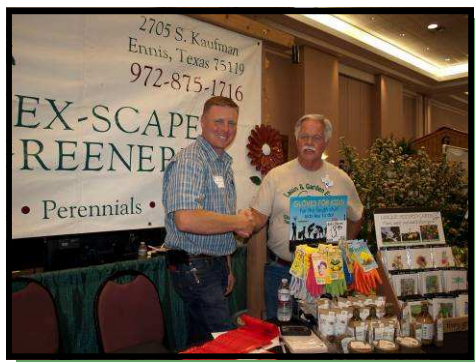
1st Place - "Most Outstanding Booth" The Greenery

Pictured: Debra Green, Tyler Wimpee, Cassie Green-Hill, James Kocian and Cheryl Sandoval, 2012 Expo Chairperson



1st Place - "Most Creative Booth" EarthTones Greenery

Pictured: Scott Melichar, Landscape James Kocian and Cheryl Sandoval, 2012 Expo Chairperson



2nd Place - "Most Outstanding" Tex-Scapes Greenery Ennis

Casey Hendrix and James Kocian



2nd Place - "Most Creative" DFW Truck Farm

Xrisi Soderquist, James Kocian, Marilyn Simmons and Donelle Simmons

Inside this issue:

2012 Photo Contest	2
It's April, What Needs to be done	3
Vegetable Gardening	4
What's Happening in April	4-5
Herbs of the Month	6
Grafting Tomatoes	7
EarthKind Landscaping	7
Pollinators	8
Water Conservation	9
Gardening Fundamentals	10
Landscape Gardening	11

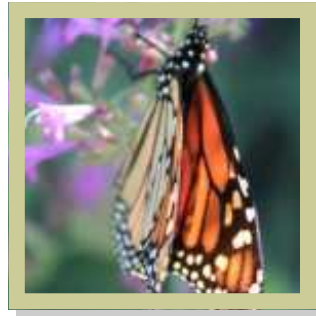
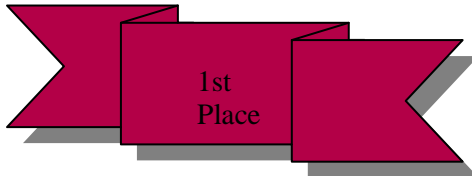
Happy Easter!

2012 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

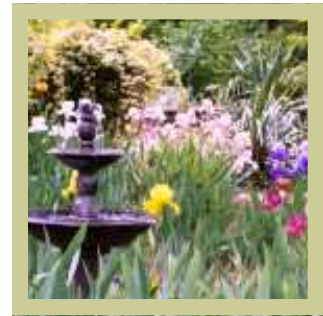
The Ellis County Master Gardeners would like to extend a gracious "thank you" to all who contributed in the 2012 Ellis County Master Gardener Association photo contest. If you missed this year's contest, be sure to get your camera out and ready for 2013!

Single Specimen

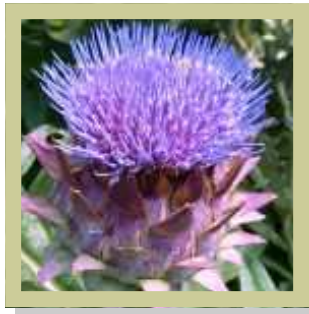
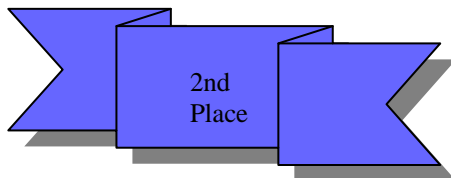
In The Garden



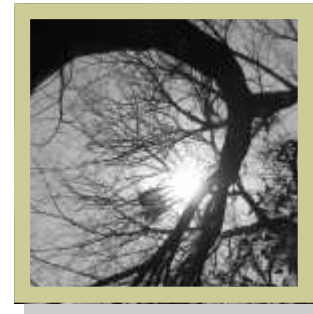
Jeff Prachyl



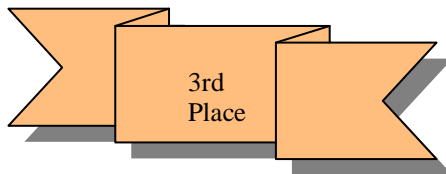
Peggy Crabtree



Peggy Crabtree



Belle Prachyl



Donna Sale



Nancy Davidson



The Ellis County Master Gardeners would like to thank our sponsors for this year's photo contest: The Greenery and Roland's Nursery for donating the prizes.

Look for the 2012 contest starting this summer!

Peggy Crabtree was on hand to receive her 1st and 2nd prizes from our photo contest sponsors

It's April...What Needs to be Done?



Pink Sensitive Briar,
MG Photo Contest Entry

Planting

- Plant St. Augustine and hybrid Bermuda sod. St. Augustine can take some shade but Bermuda needs full sun. Make good seed-to-soil contact (use a roller) and keep sod moist until new roots are established. Common Bermuda can be started from seed but it is best to hydromulch. In either case, keep the area moist for several weeks.
- Establish warm-season annuals from transplants. For sunny areas consider zinnias, firebush, pentas, petunias, blue daze, moss rose, purslane, butterfly weed, lantana, sweet potato vine and Dahlberg daisy. For shade, consider begonias, Persian shield, coleus, impatiens, ferns and hostas. Wait until May to plant caladiums.
- Sow okra seeds.
- Herbs such as dill, parsley, fennel, mint, oregano, thyme, basil and Mexican mint marigolds can be planted from transplants.
- Wait until May to plant the hot-weather tropicals like hibiscus, Esperanza and plumbago.

Fertilizing and Pruning

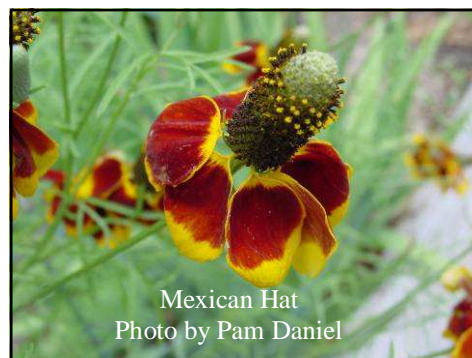
- Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to lawns. This is usually after the third mowing when the entire lawn is green. Follow up with additional fertilizer in June (optional) and again in September. St. Augustine and Bermuda grass need one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet, 2 to 3 times a year.
- Mow Bermuda grass frequently at 1½ inches to keep thick and healthy; and mow St. Augustine at 2½ inches. Raise the mowing height one notch later in the summer to reduce water requirements and to make the grass more draught tolerant.
- Use a mulching mower and leave grass clippings on the ground. They will provide a source of nitrogen to feed the lawn.
- Six weeks after flowering, thin peaches to one fruit every 6 inches.

Garden Watch

- Closely inspect plants for insects. Treat only if you see the insect. Many insects are beneficial such as lady bugs, garden spiders, praying mantis and assassin bugs. Identify the pest. If it is one that must be controlled, use an appropriate insecticide for that insect. The insecticide must make contact with the insect or be used while it is feeding on foliage.
- For fire ants, use the "Texas two-step method". First, apply fire-ant bait to the area with a hand spreader. Use fresh bait from unopened containers. If fire-ant colonies are still active after using the bait, treat the individual mounds with an appropriate insecticide. There are organic and chemical types available. Beneficial nematodes (microscopic worms) that can be purchased at many nurseries are also effective. Make sure you get the type that kills fire ants. If only a few mounds are present, avoid treating the entire lawn with an insecticide. It can kill earthworms and other insects that are not harmful.

Odds and Ends

- Read the labels on plants that you buy. Does it need sun or shade? Check the hardiness zone for perennial plants. The hardiness zone is the lowest average temperature for an area. Ellis County is in zone 8, meaning the plant is hardy from 10 to 15 degrees in the winter.
- After planting annuals in your landscape, use any leftovers to make interesting container groupings. Visit your local nursery or garden center to see the many new plant options.
- Shade plants, including those in containers, will use much less water than those in the sun.
- Take cuttings and divisions of plants from your gardens that are rare, unusual or hard to find. Share them with others.



Mexican Hat
Photo by Pam Daniel

Wildflower Garden

In 1997, the Texas State Legislature designated Ennis as the home of the "Official Texas Bluebonnet Trail" and the "Official Bluebonnet City of Texas" with 40 miles of the oldest flower-lined trails known in Texas. The North Central region of the State is home to hundreds of species of wildflower varieties. Many are now available at local nurseries as plants or in seed form. Start by sowing seeds in the fall in areas similar to where they are seen in the wild. Research germination time, water, sun and soil requirements for species before planting. When sowing large areas, crisscross seeds, mixed 1 part seed to 4 parts inert material such as masonry sand, perlite, or potting soil. Walk over area covering seeds with no more than 1/16" of soil. Seed-to-soil contact is critical.

Vegetable Gardening

By Jane LaComette
Ellis County Master Gardener



Some Like it Hot!

Peppers are a Texas Tradition

Peppers are one of the most popular vegetables grown in Texas gardens. It's easy to see why – they are colorful, come in many varieties, are easy to grow, and can be preserved for enjoyment for months after the harvest.

I usually plant a variety of hot and mild peppers. My husband likes spicy jalapeños and Serranos, using them in salsa, as an accompaniment to Mexican food dishes, and pickled. I prefer sweet banana peppers, pimentos, and sweet bell peppers.

Peppers are a warm-season vegetable that should be planted one to four weeks after the last frost of the season. They are best planted from transplants rather than seed. Space 18 to 24 inches apart, in rows 24 to 36 inches apart, in a well-drained sunny location receiving at least 8 hours of sun a day.



Prepare the garden with mulch to keep down weeds and retain moisture. Also use manure and a 1-2-1 ratio fertilizer. Pepper plants prefer moist, not wet soil, so water regularly in the hot, dry summer months. When the peppers bloom, fertilize again to encourage vigorous growth of fruit.

The pepper harvest can continue for weeks as you pick ripe fruit and see new peppers replenish them. Do not break them off the plant – it is better to cut them. Production is likely to slow down when the temperature reaches over 90° degrees. It will pick up again when the weather cools down, and you should have a bountiful fall harvest with enough for canning!

Pickled Jalapeno Peppers

(Recipe Courtesy AgriLife Extension)

1 pound jalapeno peppers
1 cup vinegar
¼ cup water
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon mixed pickling spices

Wash peppers and pack tightly into a hot jar, leaving ½ inch of space at the top. Combine vinegar, water, salt and pickling spice; heat to boiling. Pour boiling liquid over the peppers to ½ inch from top of jar. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Put on lids. Process in boiling water canner for 10 minutes.

What's Happening in April

Through April 8 - Dallas Blooms at the Dallas Arboretum. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org> for details.

April 1 - April 22 - Ennis Bluebonnet Trails

Thursday, April 19 - Rain Barrel Classes - Put on by the Waxahachie Parks and Recreation Dept., in conjunction with the Ellis County Master Gardeners. At the Parks & Recreation Building, 401 S. Elm. \$30/person, will take home a completed rain barrel. Space is limited to 20 participants on a first come, first served basis. Register in person at City Hall, 401 S. Rogers, in the Utility Billing Department, downstairs or contact John Smith at 972-937-7330, ext. 181 or Amy Hollywood at 972-937-7330, ext. 384.

Friday, April 20- Sunday April 22 - Tex-Scapes Greenery Organic Day

Saturday-Sunday, April 21-22 - Ennis Bluebonnet Festival, downtown Ennis, TX.

Friday, April 27 - Tex-Scapes Greenery Arbor Day Tree Sale

Saturday, April 28 - Midlothian Spring Fling

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Dogwood Canyon
1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill

Thursday, April 5 - 1st Thursday - Free day, all day. Visit www.audubondallas.org for details.

Saturday, April 28, 9-12 - 4th Saturday. Trail building and habitat management activities. Contact dwilson@audubon.org.

Nature Walks with Master Naturalist **Jim Varnum**, jevarnum@aol.com for guided hikes and learn about Dogwood Canyon's unique ecosystem. (Wednesdays @ 2:30, Saturdays @ 11:00 and Sundays @ 2:30).

Cedar Ridge Preserve
7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas
www.audubondallas.org

Saturday, May 5 - Hike-a-Thon (hike on the wild side). \$20/person, \$5/child (6-12). Rain or shine. Registration 7:30-10:30. For more questions/info: audubondallas.org; click on Cedar Ridge Preserve.

3rd Saturday of every month, 9-12 - Habitat Restoration and Trail Maintenance. Questions/info: info_CRP@yahoo.com.

Cedar Hill Library
(Contact Aranda Bell, 972-291-7323)

Tuesday, April 3, 6:00 p.m., Square Foot Gardening - includes a potluck dinner

Thursday, April 26, 6:30 p.m. - Beneficial Insects

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**Lighthouse for Learning**  
(with the Ellis County Master Gardeners)  
For reservations: call Melissa Cobb at 972-923-4631



**Monday, April 9, 5:30 – 8:00 - Plant Propagation.** Students will learn the basics of plant propagation, increasing and multiplying plants for the house, landscape and garden. After a short presentation in the classroom, students will have hands-on experience in the WISD High School greenhouse. **Instructors:** Walt Friis & Maureen Nitkowski, Cost: \$12.00.

**Monday, April 16, 6:00-7:30 - EarthKind® Gardening.** EarthKind® urban landscape practices are based on proven research techniques which protect the environment. This class will focus on plant selection and best planting methods. **Instructors:** Maureen Nitkowski and Jackie Wilhite, Cost: \$12.00.

**Monday, April 23, 6:00 – 7:30 - Tough Texas Plants.** Come see a power point presentation on selected ornamental plants that have been designated “flameproof” and have made the “North Texas Winners Circle” in the trial gardens at the Dallas Arboretum.

**Instructor:** Shirley Campbell, Cost: \$12.00.

(Continued from page 10)

your house, they don't just dry out – they heat up the contents and can bake the plant roots. You have to monitor often to make sure they don't dry out. However, due to their heating function, they can be great for winter plantings.

Plastic pots are light, durable, inexpensive and they over winter well. They also help conserve moisture. I prefer to plant in plastic and then drop the plastic planter into a better looking pot made from one of the materials above. Or, for fun, I set them inside an old shoe, wagon, watering can, or ... pretty much any other container to jazz up the garden.

| Terracotta                                                                                                |                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| PROS                                                                                                      | CONS                                                        |
| Inexpensive<br>Easy to move<br>Dry out quickly                                                            | Crack & crumble<br>Not weather resistant<br>Dry out quickly |
| Stone/Concrete                                                                                            |                                                             |
| PROS                                                                                                      | CONS                                                        |
| Good at maintaining soil temps<br>Insulate<br>Strong & sturdy<br>Hold on to moisture<br>Classy appearance | Heavy and hard to move<br>Expensive                         |

## Herb of the Month

*By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



### Please Eat the Roses

(But only if they are Organic)

*By Arlene Hamilton, Ellis County Master Gardener*



The herb of the year for 2012 is the Rose (*Rosa* spp.) The rose is considered the queen of the flower garden, a symbol of love and beauty for more than 3000 years. The rose is native to the northern hemisphere. In China, known to be the center of the origin, there is evidence that roses were cultivated as early as 500 BC. In Roman times baskets of rose petals were strewn ankle deep for the emperors and guests. Its petals have been used in potpourri and perfume as well as candies, syrups, medicines and cosmetics.

The weekend of March 16 was the annual Herbal Forum in Round Top, Texas, hosted by the Pioneer Unit of The Herb Society of America and the Round Top Festival Institute. This is one of my favorite herbal get-a-ways. I've only missed one since arriving in Texas twelve years ago. Of course the focus was the beautiful flower of summer; the rose. The theme for the weekend was "Roses are Herbs too" and was featured everywhere from the herbal plant sale to the workshops, the presentations and to the tables arrayed with delicious rose flavored treats.

Michael Shoup, owner of The Antique Rose Emporium spoke of organic rose growing and the importance of growing the right rose for your garden and area. He spoke lovingly of the old roses or "found roses" that are resilient survivors, many residing in old cemeteries and long-abandoned homestead sites. They are often fragrant, a trait often missing in modern roses and so important to the memory and emotional tie to the garden experience.

Henry Flowers, Garden Director at Festival Hill, spoke of the history of roses and their cultivation which includes full sun (at least 6 hours), good air circulation and rich, well-drained soil. He also emphasized old roses as being more resistant to diseases and insects. At Festival Hill his approach is to not spray for fungal problems. Aphids and mites are treated with an occasional spray of water and insecticidal soap. These organic methods encourage beneficial insects such as lady beetles and lacewings.

Of course, my favorite part of the weekend was the food! I dipped rose petals in chocolate, and learned to make rose flavored truffles. Billi Parus from Virginia Beach, Virginia, taught us how to make rose water, rose syrup, rose vinegar, floral sugars and ended her workshop by whipping up a batch of lavender grape jelly.

At the various meals we were treated to Bread Pudding with Rose Syrup, Baklava with Rose Water, Rose and Cardamom Ice Cream (yummy), Rosey Cheesecake and Pineapple-Rose Punch.

Here is Billi Parus' Easy Floral Punch:

- Any juice such as lemonade or limeade sweetened with a floral syrup (purchased at Middle Eastern grocer) or to make your own syrup,
- bring 1 cup water to a boil, remove from heat and steep with
- 2 cups rose petals until it comes back to room temperature, approximately one hour.
- Strain out the petals and add a drop or two of red food coloring.
- Put back in saucepan and boil for 5 minutes more.
- Pour into sterilized bottles.
- Refrigerate and use within a day or two.

NOTE: The above Pineapple-Rose Punch featured pineapple juice infused with rose petals, and lemon-lime soda. It was a wonderful, relaxing weekend. I am already looking forward to next year when we will celebrate the 2013 Herb of the Year – Elderberry.





## Grafting Tomatoes

By Maureen F. Nitkowski, Ellis County Master Gardener

In May 2011 I was fortunate to attend Plant Propagation Training for Master Gardeners. The twelve hour course covered seed germination and methods of asexual plant propagation, but the section on grafting held the most fascination for me.

As a child I remember my grandfather and some neighbors sharing fruit tree varieties by means of cuttings which they grafted onto trees already in place. Indeed, we had four kinds of pears on our original Seckel pear tree, and they all ripened at different times. The motivation to do grafting was financial (cuttings were free), space-saving (four varieties on one tree), and social (exchange of information). I recall that sharp grafting knives, beeswax and tape were the tools needed for cleft graft- is the same today except that beeswax is no longer used.

One aspect of the grafting training was specific for tomatoes. My first thought was, "toes?" Tomatoes are an annual plant with many varieties readily available at inexpensive prices. The reason for grafting tomatoes is increased productivity. There is a growing market demand for heirloom varieties which are favored for their flavor but do not have the disease resistance of hybrid varieties. By grafting an heirloom scion onto a hybrid rootstock many disease situations are avoided. An added bonus is that the yield of fruit is increased. Tomato grafting only requires a razor blade, silicon clips which fasten the scion to the rootstock plus some time in an improvised shade greenhouse which growers can easily manage. The clips are available from some of the gardening supply catalogues and only require that both stems being fitted are similar in size. If we imagine a little further use for grafting tomatoes, could a tomato be grafted to an egg-plant to produce a plant with both fruits on it? Maybe this is the patio garden of the future.



ing. The procedure

"Why graft tomatoes; why graft? demand for heirloom



## Earth-Kind® Landscaping

By Jackie Wilhite, Ellis County Master Gardener

Earth-Kind® is a registered trademark held by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The A&M University System. It is the result of years of work by professionals such as horticultural specialists, county extension agents, nursery industry representatives and volunteers including Master Gardeners. What has evolved through the years of research-proven techniques is a patented process that requires the protection of an entire legal department at TAMU. This patented system continues to be imitated, but never duplicated.

The principle goals of Earth-Kind® landscaping are: water conservation, safe use and handling of fertilizers and pesticides, reducing yard waste entering urban landfills, and landscaping for energy conservation. This system supports the idea that, by (1) planning a landscape design, (2) preparing the soil with 3" of compost and 3" of expanded shale, (3) selecting plants that are native or adapted non-native species, (4) following proper planting practices and (5) adding 3" of mulch to cover the soil surface around plants, homeowners will replace labor-intensive, water-wasting gardening practices with sustainable renewable ones.



The continued application of mulch retains soil moisture and feeds microbes to help avoid the need for fertilizer application. Compost tea is recommended as an alternative for fertilizer. When fertilizer is used on plants such as heavy feeding roses, it is placed on top of the soil so it feeds the roots as it enters the soil. Healthy plants rarely ever require pesticides. This elimination of pesticides will bring on the renewal of beneficial insects in the landscape that devour the bad insects for sport. This is the best method by far. It reduces the work on the homeowner by using mulch to retain moisture and reduce watering. This in turn reduces gardening chores and becomes a much more cost-effective way to garden.

The Earth-Kind® system has also evaluated plants -- mostly perennials, roses, and turf grasses used in trial beds across the state. The results of these trials are available at the following websites: [www.Earth-Kind.tamu.edu](http://www.Earth-Kind.tamu.edu), [www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu](http://www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu), [www.urbanlandscapeguide.tamu.edu](http://www.urbanlandscapeguide.tamu.edu), and [www.Texasuperstar.com](http://www.Texasuperstar.com).

This is merely a highlight of the information in the Earth-Kind® Environmental Landscape Management System. Water conservation and rainwater harvesting is also a big part of the system, as is the fruit and vegetable gardening guide. New varieties of fruit and vegetable plants are in trials at this time. Look for an expanded list of plants and gardening methods for fruit and vegetable gardening to be forthcoming. Check out the above listed web-sites for more information on this patented system.

The environmental values of this system will be measured for years to come as we evaluate the improvements made to the soil, the reduction of fertilizers and pesticides to our eco systems, and conservation of not only our time and money but a very precious commodity--water.

## Pollinators are Welcome

*Submitted by Diane Hopkins, Ellis County Master Gardener*



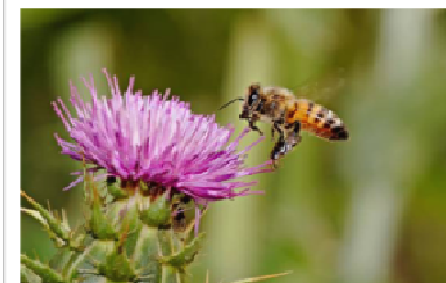
By this time of the year most gardeners have already purchased their seed, prepared the soil and some may have planted portions of their garden. As we plan and work our gardens most of our focus is on soil preparation, planting, watering, fertilizing and weeding. Pollination of the plants is generally left up to Mother Nature. We just trust that the transfer of pollen from an anther to a stigma of the flower will take place. For the most part that generally happens, but the gardener can improve the chances of that happening by incorporating a few simple techniques into their gardening practices.

Start by knowing your soil; test your soil and recognize its deficiencies. Improve its gardening potential by making the recommended modifications. Healthy plants produce healthy nectar and pollen. Pollinators such as bees, butterflies and other insects will search for the highest quality pollen and nectar available.

Next provide a constant supply of water in a shady, secluded spot in your garden for the pollinator's easy access. If they must leave your garden to find a water source there's a good possibility they will move on to another food source as well. A simple shallow basin with a rock placed inside for landing on will do the trick.

You should plant a good variety of plants to maintain a succession of blooms as long as possible. Once pollinators have located a food source they will most likely continue gathering at that location until it is depleted. The goal is to keep them coming to your garden until the end of your harvest.

You should allow plenty of time to keep your garden weed free. We must always start out weeding regularly but as the temperature rises and harvesting begins, the weeding can become overwhelming. Try to stay on top of it because some weed blossoms contain higher levels of protein than some of our fruit, vegetable and landscape plants. The pollinators will visit these weed blossoms for nectar and pollen, before they visit your garden plants, because of its higher quality.



Last but definitely not least, refrain from using pesticides when possible. Using alternative methods of pest control will protect the pollinators visiting your garden. Hard water sprays can be an effective method of dislodging small pest, such as aphids, and larger bugs and caterpillars can be removed by hand-picking.

The decrease in population of native pollinators due to the use of pesticides has increased our reliance on the honey bee for pollination. Bees pollinate about 130 fruit,

vegetable, nut, ornamental and fiber crops in the United States contributing about \$15 billion annually through improved crop yield and product quality.

The honey bee is a 10 times more efficient pollinator than all other insects. It is the only insect to actively seek out flowers with pollen and gathers it to be mixed with honey to make the food they must have for survival. Other insect pollinators are in search of nectar only and come in contact with the pollen quite accidentally. So, if you see bees visiting the blossoms in your garden it is a time to celebrate and not a time to panic.

I encourage you to incorporate these simple techniques into your gardening routine. You will be laying out the welcome mat to all pollinators. You will reap a better yield and higher quality produce for your efforts.

*(Continued from page 11)*

should be controlled. Always follow label instructions on approved pesticides for control. Washing them off with a strong spray of water may be all that is necessary for adequate control.

- 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 clips and stor-

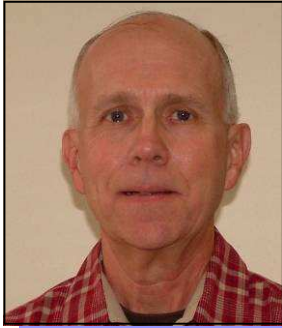
ing in a sealed glass jar in your refrigerator.

- 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 and other weeds, nematodes, and soil-borne diseases are brought into the yard through contaminated soil sources.

- Watch newspaper and other publicity for information regarding wildflower trails, and open garden days. Plan to take a trip to enjoy beautiful gardens and trails that are abundant in many areas of Texas.





## **“Conserving Water in Your Landscape”**

*Submitted by Pat Cheshier, Ellis County Master Gardener*

After the summer of 2011, we are all keenly aware of the importance of water. The conservation of water has become a necessity for us all. With the lack of adequate rainfall, rising water rates, and the competition for water by urban areas, it is essential we do our part to consider conserving that most valuable resource when planning and maintaining our landscape.

Efficient irrigation is one way to not only conserve water but to save us money. Some experts are urging homeowners to simply leave their irrigation system turned off until it is needed. This is especially true during the winter and spring months when the ground does not dry as quickly and more rain falls. In the summer, water only when plants show stress in the morning. Many plants show stress in the afternoon only because of the heat of the day and not because of lack of water. Water in the early morning hours and try to water when the wind is not blowing to make efficient use of irrigation. Last, if you have an irrigation system, be sure that it is maintained properly. Much water is lost to broken heads or those not operating efficiently.

Once you have watered, mulches provide great benefits in water conservation. Adding at least 3-4 inches of good mulch will help prevent water loss. There are a number of good commercial mulches that you can use and possibly your city such as Waxahachie or Midlothian may even have free mulch available. The other benefits of mulch are to help moderate soil temperatures and provide good organic matter to the soil as it breaks down. Mulches go a long way to slow or eliminate weed growth.

Plant selection for your landscape can provide good benefits also. For homeowners planning and designing a new landscape, consider low water use plants in your design. For existing landscapes, replacing trees, shrubs, or perennials as needed with such plants will bring help conserve water. Most oaks, Chinese Pistache, Red Oak and Desert Willow are a few selections that have low water use. For shrubs, consider Abelia, various hollies, junipers, Crepe Myrtles and yuccas. A number of perennials; those plants that return each year without replanting, can be found to need less water. Yarrow, Artemisia, Firebush, Lantana, Turk's Cap, Mexican Petunia (both types) and a number of sages and salvias are in this category. For annuals, select from Moss Rose, Copper Plant, Purslane, and Periwinkle (Vinca).

Last, when designing or making changes to a lawn, consider ground covers. These are great for slopes, small or odd shaped areas, or those close to pavement. The benefit is that ground covers need less water and less maintenance than turf grass. A few good ground covers include Purple Wintercreeper, Coral Honeysuckle and Asian Jasmine.

Water conservation is a topic that must be a priority to us all. With a little planning and effort in our landscapes, we can do much to save that most important commodity----water.



### **Conserve Water this Year by Taking the 40 Gallon Challenge!**

Across the southern United States individuals are being encouraged to take the *40 Gallon Challenge*. The *40 Gallon Challenge* is a regional campaign that challenges residents to conserve at least 40 gallons of water per day.

On average, Texans use anywhere between 100 to 150 gallons of water per person per day. The *40 Gallon Challenge Pledge Card* suggests practical tips to conserve water including simple no-cost suggestions, such as shortening your shower by two minutes, to tips which require more effort and money, such as replacing an old, non-efficient toilet with new low-flush toilet.

Taking the *40 Gallon Challenge* is as simple as filling out the Pledge Card, either online at [40gallonchallenge.org](http://40gallonchallenge.org) or at your local Extension office.



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## Gardening Fundamentals

*By Jamey Guarascio-Cosper  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



### Gardening Fundamentals ...

I recently had a conversation with a woman in the cashier line about gardening. I was looking at one of the dreamy gardening magazines when she broke into my thoughts with a statement... "I love those magazines, but I wouldn't even know where to start." As we chatted a few minutes, I discovered that she was right. She didn't know anything about the fundamentals of gardening. She sincerely believed that if she stuck the plant in the ground, it would look like the ones on the catalog at no time at all. That conversation was the inspiration for this series of articles...

#### The Basics.

There are three major components any plant needs to be successful. These components allow for plant growth, plant nutrition, and in the end, planting success.

The first component for successful gardening is that you have to have access to water. All living things rely on water as a life fuel and plants are no exception. Whether you're growing a plant in your bedroom, a pot on the patio, or a garden bed in the yard – water is key. Make sure your planting is located in an area where you can easily water it regularly.

Soil is the next basic component. Although plants grow in all types of soil, nurturing a plan through its growing cycle is most successful when you start with quality soil. Good soil will allow your plant to benefit from its nutrients, and hold water long enough for plants to drink thoroughly, but not so long that they become water logged and drown. I prefer a soil amended with a high compost blend. We'll talk about the benefits of compost and other amendments at another time.

Sunlight is the third requirement. This is the component that allows for the process of Photosynthesis – a big fancy term for plants creating their own food. Plants have different light requirements to be successful and we'll talk about those requirements when we start planting.

All three of the basic components lead us to the final thought of the day ... location location location. Where to plant your labor of love?

You may think all containers are the same, but that's kind of like saying all shoes are the same – not a true statement. Pots, like shoes, have different purposes and benefits. For example, the terracotta pot. It comes in a variety of sizes and it is pretty inexpensive. This pot holds up well in Texas, but won't last very long in say ... Utah, because most are not frost resistant. Even in Texas, they have to be replaced every few years because they crack and crumble. Terracotta pots also dry out quickly because they are so porous. They work well for plants that like drying out – like cacti and Rosemary.

Stone & Concrete planters are good for maintaining soil temperatures and retaining moisture. They heat up inside and insulate too. On the downside, they are so heavy and cumbersome to move that you generally leave them where they are initially planted. If you have a playful pup, this is one pot that doesn't get knocked over. But they can be expensive.

Wood planters are environmentally friendly and attractive. They have good water retention, but they tend to rot. They can be treated to help slow the rotting process. Keeping them off the ground helps slow the rotting process, and minimize bug infestations. Pill bugs love wood containers! Wood planters are pretty winter durable when they are treated too. Make sure they are well put together because the wood will shrink and expand with the weather, which causes stress at the joints.

Metal pots are heavy so they're good for stabilizing heavier plants. By nature of their construction, they work just like the oven in

(Continued on page 5)





## **Landscape Gardening**

*Submitted by Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener*

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com). Check this website for information on gardening in Ellis County, sign up for a monthly newsletter or access other websites including Texas A&M Horticulture website. Questions for Master Gardeners will be answered with a return telephone call or email if you leave a message at 972.825.5175.

### **Nasturtium, *Tropaeolum majus***

By Dr. William C. Welch, Texas AgriLife Extension Horticulturist, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

Distinctive appearance, rapid growth, and easy culture characterize this once popular annual. Nasturtium flower buds are sometimes pickled or used for seasonings because of their mustard oil. Unripe seed pods have a peppery flavor somewhat like watercress, and may also be used in salads.

Nasturtiums are grown as cool-season temperate plants. In Texas, the seed is usually planted about the time of the average last frost. They are usually planted where they can be allowed to mature, since young seedlings can be difficult to transplant. Seedlings started in small individual pots indoors or in the greenhouse can, however, be set out earlier, and provide a longer bloom season.

Nasturtiums are natives to the cool highlands of mountains extending from Mexico to central Argentina and Chile. There are both climbing and dwarf bush types. The dwarf types are much more commonly available, and are useful as 10- to 12-inch tall borders or as mass plantings in sun or partial shade. Flowers range in color from creamy white to orange, mahogany, red, and yellow. Double-flowered forms are also available.

Nasturtiums actually do better in soil of moderate-to-low fertility, and prefer well drained conditions. The seeds are large and sprout quickly. In most of Texas, nasturtiums bloom until really hot weather begins, usually in June. The climbing or trailing kinds can quickly cover fences, banks, or stumps, and are excellent in the winter greenhouse as a source of cut flowers and ornaments. The flowers have an unusual and refreshing fragrance.

Few insects or diseases bother nasturtiums, and they add a touch of old-fashioned

charm as borders in vegetable gardens or as potted specimens or mass plantings. They are also a good choice to mix with spring-flowering bulbs, since they can effectively hide the unattractive bulb foliage that may be allowed to mature.

Nasturtiums are at their peak of flowering in Texas during May and June. If you have not grown them before, look for places now where they can be planted early next spring. Few plants offer so much for so little.

### **Garden Checklist for April**

By Dr. William C. Welch, Texas AgriLife Extension Horticulturist, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

- Attempt to check the progress of vegetables such as lettuce, greens and potatoes daily to find the first signs of insect pests such as caterpillars or sowbugs, or "stinkbugs" feeding on the tips of potato stems.
- Collect records on the usual flowering habits of plants in your garden, so that as the season progresses assemblies can be made of colorful combinations that will bloom in unison.
- Prune spring-flowering shrubs 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.
- Roses have high fertilizer requirements. For most soils, use a complete fertilizer for the first application just as new growth starts, then use ammonium sulfate, or other high nitrogen source, every 4 to 6 weeks, usually just as the new growth cycle starts following a flowering cycle. For organic sources use cottonseed, rotted manures or alfalfa meal.
- Continue to spray rose varieties susceptible to black spot, using a spray recommended for fungus control every 7 to 10 days. Many of the Old Garden Roses

and some of the newer ones have considerable resistance to black spot.

- Climbing hybrid tea roses may be pruned as soon as they complete flowering.
- Removing spent flowers, trimming back excessive growth, and applying fertilizer to an established annual bed can do wonders towards rejuvenating and extending the life of the planting.
- 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.
- Seeds of amaranthus, 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 they are large enough to transplant. Surplus plants can be transplanted to other areas.
- It will soon be time for bagworms to attack junipers and other narrow-leaved evergreens. Control measures, such as Sevin dust or spray, should be applied while the insects and the bags are about one-half inch in length.
- When caterpillars attack live oak trees en masse, it is very alarming, but usually nothing can be done. A healthy live oak will usually re-grow its leaves and resume normal activities.
- For instant color, purchase started annual plants. Select short, compact plants. Any flowers or flower buds should be pinched to give plants an opportunity to become established.
- Check new tender growth for aphids. A few can be tolerated, but large numbers

*(Continued on page 8)*





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