



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VIII, Issue Four

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

April, 2014

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, click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE! Susan Clark, Editor

Thank you to everyone who attended the 14th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo! It was a great day and the Ellis County Master Gardeners appreciate your support. See you next year!

Congratulations to the winners of the Most Outstanding Booth and the Most Creative Booth of the 2014 Expo.

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



Earthtones Greenery



Most Outstanding Booth

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

Most Creative Booth



Garden Inspirations

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Blue Mist

Blue mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) or (*Eupatorium coelestinum*), native to the southwestern U.S., can grow to three feet tall. Flowers bloom from late spring until frost with small fuzzy clusters that are more lavender than blue. Leaves divide in three lobes approximately five inches long.

It grows better in areas with some shade and supplemental watering will be necessary, but can withstand some periods of drought. The blooms attract a wide variety of butterflies like queen, sulfur, crescent bordered patch, and skippers as a source of nectar, and can be covered with monarch butterflies during their migration. The plant spreads through underground stems and may sprawl in ideal growing conditions. It can also become invasive.

Final Tips and Little Known Facts

Operation NICE (Natives Instead of the Common Exotics) chose 'blue mist' as winner for September 2008.

Blue mist is native to the moist woody areas from Central Texas to New Jersey and north to Kansas. Plant seeds in the fall or plant rhizomes in the spring.

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

Planting

- ✿ Plant St. Augustine and hybrid Bermuda sod. St. Augustine can take some shade, but Bermuda needs full sun (six hours or more of direct sun). Sod must make good contact with the soil (use a roller) and keep sod moist until new roots are established. Common Bermuda can be started from seed, but it is best to hydro-mulch. Keep the area moist until grass begins to grow.
- ✿ Plant okra seeds directly into the ground.
- ✿ Herbs such as dill, parsley, fennel, mint, oregano, thyme, basil, and Mexican mint marigold can be planted from transplants.

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 1,000 square feet, two to three times a year.
- ✿ Mow Bermuda grass frequently at 1½ inches to keep thick and healthy; 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 drought tolerant.
- ✿ 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 12 inches.

Garden Watch

- ✿ Closely inspect plants for insects. Treat only if you see the insect and if damage has occurred. Many insects are beneficial such as lady bugs, garden spiders, praying mantis, and assassin bugs. After identifying the pest, and if it is one that must be controlled, use an appropriate insecticide. Most insecticides must make contact with the insect while it is feeding on the 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. 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.



Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Mealy Blue Sage—Mint Family (Lamiaceae)
Salvia farinacea Benth

Region: 2–8, 10 (Ellis County is Region 4)
Size: 6–36 inches
Blooms: March–November, Perennial

This two to three foot upright or sprawling perennial, usually forms a mound as wide as the plant is tall. Mealy sage is named for the mealy-white (sometimes purple) appearance of the sepals, which are covered with felted hairs. The blue flowers are five-lobed and two-lipped, 2/3–3/4 inch long, with two stamens and one pistil. They have the usual sage fragrance. The long, narrow leaves grow in clusters, out of which grow the flower stems. The leaves may or may not have teeth. Dark blue to white, tubular flowers are densely congested in whorls along the upper stems, creating a three to nine in. spike. Gray-green, lance-shaped leaves are numerous, especially in the lower portion of the plant.

Mealy blue sage is widespread on limestone soils. Because it flowers for an exceptionally long time and is not readily browsed, it is of great value to pollinators. It is a favorite plant for xeric gardens and is often available in nurseries. Sage tea is said to reduce bodily secretions and is useful in decreasing lactation during weaning, as well as reducing sinus mucus. The tea can be gargled or drunk to treat sore throat.

Light House for Learning

(With the Ellis County Master Gardeners)

For reservations, call Melissa Cobb at (972) 923-4631.

Register online at http://www.wisd.org/default.aspx?name=CO_LighthouseforLearning

Monday, April 14, 6:00–7:30 Seed Saving. Learn to harvest, clean and store seeds for successful germination. Learn how to save heirloom vegetables and perennial flowers. Determine what plants are best for seed saving and when to propagate from existing plants. **Instructor:** Monica Nyenhuis Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 21, 6:00–7:30 Earth-Kind® Roses and Companion Plants. The Earth-Kind program provides plant choices for the gardener which have been field tested in Texas and proven to be less susceptible to pests, diseases and other problems. Recommended rose varieties come as dwarf, small and medium shrubs as well as climbers which will meet the needs of the home gardener. An assortment of companion plants for the roses which are equally durable will also be discussed. **Instructor:** Maureen Nitkowski Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 28, 6:00–7:30 Container Gardening. Imagine walking out on your own deck or patio and harvesting vine-ripened tomatoes, fresh herbs, or crisp cucumbers. Growing vegetables in containers is not difficult. Let us show you how to bring the farmers market to your own back door. **Instructor:** Robin Smith Cost: \$12.00

Tuesdays, April 8–29, four classes, 6:00– 8:00 “Ag 101”—Beginning Farmer/Rancher. Join this experienced instructor as you cover these topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management. This class will be held at the Ellis County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3 in Waxahachie. **Instructor:** Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources Cost: \$22.00



Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



Herb of the Month – Artemisia

Since 1995 the International Herb Association has designated an herb of the year. As a result herb societies, groups, and organizations from around the world, work together to educate the public about these important herbs throughout the year.

The 2014 Herb of the Year™ is Artemisia. You may think this is an unfamiliar plant, but actually there are over 300 species some of which are common flavors to the table. Artemisia is referenced in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. Artemisias are among the bitterest of herbs due to their thujone content. Because of their bitterness they became associated with sadness, suffering, and misfortune.

Historically, Artemisias were used as strewing herbs in the home to repel insects. Today we rarely strew them, but they continue to be popular insect repellents both in the home and in the garden. Artemisia is a vermifuge and repellent. Many Artemisias are highly fragrant with a camphor-like, clean and refreshing aroma.

Culinary Artemisia dracunculus 'sativa'—French Tarragon has a wonderful anise-like aroma and taste, which is prized by chefs worldwide. It is an essential ingredient in béarnaise sauce and fines herbes. Tarragon flavored vinegar makes a delicious salad dressing or splash some on vegetables.



Because of the selection process the plant is sterile and cannot produce seed. Therefore it is propagated by cuttings. If you find tarragon seeds, they are likely Russian tarragon and are a poor substitute. Tarragon does not like the hot Texas summers and prefers colder winters so does best further north.

Artemisia ludoviciana—Estafiate, also called White Sagebrush is native to western North America and is widespread in Texas. Native Americans and Mexicans use it in a medicinal tea and to flavor sauces for wild meat. Silver King and Silver Queen grow well in the herb garden, but need to be managed to control their vigorous spreading habit. They make beautiful silver additions to floral arrangements.

Artemisia absinthium—Wormwood means “without sweetness” for its bitter taste. It is used to make the liqueur absinthe. At one point, absinthe liqueur was banned because it was believed to be hallucinogenic due to its thujone content. At present, low doses of thujone-free wormwood are considered GRAS (generally recognized as safe). Absinthe is currently

undergoing resurgence in popularity. Powis Castle is a beautiful hybrid

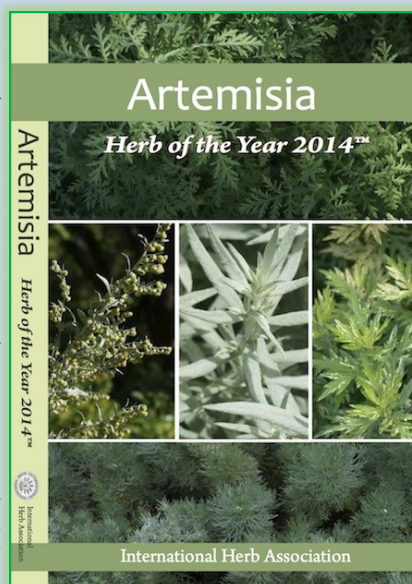
which has become the most popular ornamental plant in the genus. Pruning back in late winter or early spring promotes new growth and a fuller look. Another common landscape favorite is Dusty Miller, with a low growing, wide-spreading habit.

After Tarragon, my favorite Artemisia is Southernwood. This low growing, sprawling evergreen has a highly aromatic aroma and is traditionally used in sachets to repel moths and other insects. Tucking little fabric sachets among winter woollens or in the lingerie drawer is a fresh, fragrant way to keep pests away

and eliminate the unpleasant mothball smell.

If you are fortunate enough to have southernwood in your garden, here is my favorite Moth Repellent. Combine two parts southernwood, two parts tansy, and one part thyme. With a mortar and pestle, crush a cinnamon stick and a few cloves. Add someorris root as a fixative and blend all. Fill small fabric packets, seal and place with clothing in storage containers and drawers.

For more information on The Herb of the Year™, visit the web pages of The Herb Society of America at www.herbsociety.org or the International Herb Association at www.iherb.org



EXPO 2014!

The Ellis County Master Gardeners would like to thank everyone who was able to attend the 14th Annual Lawn and Garden Expo. We also want to thank the many exhibitors, sponsors, and speakers who helped make the event possible.

Smoky Bear visited the children's workshop again this year and enjoyed taking pictures with all the children. As in the past, he was a really big hit with all including the parents. The children's area was busy as usual with lots of activities including a large display of bugs and a honey bee demonstration. Children also had some fun making their own seed tape and seedling pots made from newspaper.

The presentations on Monarch Butterflies, Trial by Flower, and Foods and Flavors of the Southwest were attended by over 300 people. Dr. Kiphart from Austin spoke on developing monarch waystations. Jenny Wegley, who grew up in Midlothian and is greenhouses at the Dallas Arboretum gave but not least, Arlene Hamilton and Susan



now the director of research and the presentation on trial flowers. Last Clark, both Ellis County Master Gardens, gave the food presentation. As a treat, delicious samples of the foods of the southwest and recipes were available.

We were happy to see people streaming out with plants they had purchased from the Master Gardeners and many of the other vendors. Plants are

a good start to bringing in the spring!

Roses, tomatoes, and hanging baskets proved to be top sellers. Based on input, we're already planning to offer more peppers next year. And we will continue to offer perennials with special attention to those that attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Don't forget the Farmers Market in Waxahachie has started for the 2014

season. There will be a plant featured each month and available for purchase, as well as special events and Master Gardeners on hand to answer your gardening questions.



The sponsors of this year's Expo are listed on the back page. Without them we could not have had such a successful year. Thank you very much.

Submitted by Expo Chairman, Gail Cosgrove and Plant Sales Chairman, Cheryl Sandoval.



**Interested in becoming a
2015 Expo Sponsor Or
Expo Exhibitor?**

Contact James Kocian at
expo.ecmga@yahoo.com

Reserve the date: March 28, 2015!

Insects...Good or Bad?

By Susan Gilliland
Ellis County Master Gardener



Are you one of those people who hate insects and grab a can of killer spray just to keep them away? Think twice before you do it next time, please. Learn about a few insects that naturally control garden pests. It is often said that 95% of all insects are good, but really categorizing them with good or bad is not fair. In nature, each insect has an essential role in maintaining a balanced, healthy ecosystem. Humans are the force that really upsets the balance.

Let's review our science lessons about insects. Entomologists are people who study insects. Insects are categorized in three ways: 1) predators, 2) pollinators, and 3) recyclers.

Predators are insects that hunt for a living. They catch, kill and eat other insects. Gardeners like these insects because they kill the pest insects that eat their plants. A wide variety of predators in your garden and around your house will eliminate the need for chemicals and pesticides.

Some common examples include; spiders, lady beetles, praying mantis, dragonflies, soldier beetles and lacewings. Predators eat some of the things that we don't want on our plants such as aphids, mealybugs, scale, whiteflies, mites, cutworms, snails, and slugs.

Pollinators. When an insect visits a flower looking for nectar, it will pick up pollen. Then it visits another flower and drops some pollen into that flower. That mixing of pollen begins the process of pollination, which produces a new seed or fruit. Bees are very important pollinators and there are many different kinds: honey bees, bumble bees (*pictured*), carpenter bees and leaf cutting bees. Most bees visit

flowers to collect nectar for food or gather pollen. They carry the pollen on the hairs of their body to the next flower. Honey bees take the nectar back to their bee hive to make honey.

Butterflies are also pollinators. Adult butterflies have a



special rolled up mouthpart called a proboscis that allows them to reach deep in flower to get nectar. When they are ready to drink, they unroll their proboscis and reach into the flower. When they visit different flowers, they transfer the pollen from one flower to another. Pollinators have a very important job that benefits farmers and gardeners.

Recyclers and Decomposers. Some insects are beneficial because they help recycle waste. Most people do not think of these insects as beneficial because they are usually found in trash and decaying matter. They are important because they help things decompose and keep the trash from piling up.

A few of these include: termites, flies, grub beetle, and dung beetle. These insects break decaying matter into materials that mix in with our soil. Even though it sounds kind of gross, they do good

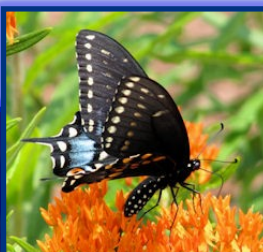
work. Now, that's a dirty job!

Choices have to be made about the goodness or badness of any insect:

☛ Termites are bad if they are eating your house, but good if they are breaking down fallen trees to recycle back into the forest floor.

☛ Bees are outstanding pollinators and they make honey. Bees can also sting, but that does not make them a 'bad' insect.

☛ The Black Swallowtail (*pictured*) butterfly is special to a butterfly gardener, but the larva (*pictured*) will consume your parsley, carrots, dill, and fennel. Maybe you should grow a second batch of parsley in another garden area and move the larva to its preferred dining table so you can enjoy the resulting butterflies and be able to grow your herbs.



☛ A bug not appreciated by a butterfly gardener is the milkweed assassin bug (*pictured*) because they eat all kinds of caterpillars that eventually turn into butterflies. But, the assassin bug also preys on a diverse variety of insect pests including flies, mosquitoes, beetles, army worms, and stink bugs. Some bites (sharp pain) might occur when the bugs are purposely handled or accidentally contacted while gardening. Deciding on whether it is good or bad depends on your outlook, but learning to get along with these predators really is in our own interest.



☛ Spiders are one of the BEST predators and they are abundant and widespread. They are a natural controller of insect populations. Very few spiders bite, but they have a good appetite for unwanted



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What's Happening in April



IT'S BACK! Every Saturday from April to October from 8am–1pm.

Saturday, April 12 is Kid's Day!

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 Gardening Classes •

There are many opportunities in our area for learning more about gardening and the environment. Ellis County Master Gardeners' Lighthouse for Learning spring classes are listed on page three. The following organizations also offer classes. Please visit their websites for more information.

Saturday, April 12, 10am, "Solving the Mystery of Tomatoes and Peppers" with Val Nolen. Val will answer all your questions about warm season vegetables. Please reserve your space and handout by calling (972) 207-2938 or email mother-herbs@gmail.com

The Dallas Arboretum. Classes include: Succulents, Roses, Containers, Greenhouses, Xeriscapes, and many more. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/education/adult-programs> for details and to register. Fees vary. **Ask an Expert and Dig in Deep Events** include Composting, Mulching, Organic Gardening, and more. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/visit/seasonal-festivals-events/dallas-blooms>

Garden Inspirations. Classes in April include Vegetable Gardening, Perennials, Tomatoes, and more. For complete details and to register for classes, visit www.gardeninspirations-tx.com.

Sunday May 4, 9am–4:30pm, Level 1, Introduction to Native Landscapes presented by the Native Plant Society of TX. You will learn the value of including and preserving native plants in landscapes, understand the differences between sustainable and conventional development, learn your Texas vegetation region and soil type, and learn 50 native Texas plants recommended for your landscape. Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center, Cedar Hill. Visit <http://npsot.org/wp/nlcp/north-texas-classes> to register.

• Plant Sales •

Are you using Texas natives to help combat the hot, dry weather? Check out these local plant sales.

Saturday, April 12, 9am–3pm, Tarrant County Master Gardeners Plant Sale. Perennials, annuals, succulents, roses, natives, and more on sale. Presentations on composting, containers, and more. For information, go to <http://tarrantmg.org>

Friday, April 25, 3pm–4pm and Saturday, April 26, 9am–10am, TX Discovery Gardens Plant Sale Safaris. At these pre-sale tours, the Director of Horticulture, Roger Sanderson, shows you how to incorporate native and adapted plants into your landscape. Learn about the environmental conditions they thrive in and the beneficial insects they attract. \$10, \$5 for TDG Members. Advance registration strongly encouraged.

Saturday, April 26 and Sunday, April 27, 10am–2 pm, Butterfly Plant Sale. Enjoy native and adapted plants that are hard to find in local nurseries! Members also receive 10% off plants. For info, visit TexasDiscoveryGardens.org



Saturday, April 12 and Sunday, April 13, 9am–5pm, Ennis Bluebonnet Trails Festival. Enjoy a weekend of Arts and Crafts, Bluebonnet Souvenirs, Children's Activities, Exciting Live Music and scenic country rides taking in all the beautiful wildflowers with our Bluebonnet Trails Map. FREE ADMISSION! Info at <http://www.visitennis.org/bluebonnetfestival.htm>

Now through Sunday, April 20, Dallas Blooms at the Dallas Arboretum. Now in its 30th year, this annual festival offers one of the most spectacular floral displays in the world featuring over 500,000 blooming spring bulbs. View the outstanding collection of

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Insects (Continued from page 6)

insects. Yes, it is a nuisance to walk through a web and get the gunk on your face, but please don't spray them—learn to live with them.



Most insects are good and they are called "beneficials". Plants that attract beneficials are typically those with small flowers arranged in clusters. Families with these characteristics include: carrot, asters, mustard, and daisy. Flowers of these plants provide easy nectar and a clear landing strip.

Using good horticultural practices also goes a long way to help prevent and or minimize pest infestations. Inspect your plants frequently. When possible, use disease resistant plant varieties and keep your plants healthy by providing proper moisture, drainage, and air circulation.

Learn to identify your friends and enemies. If chemicals have to be used, use the least toxic product to achieve the goal, such as horticultural oils and insecticidal soap. Remember that beneficials are still insects and broad spectrum insecticides that wipe out the bad bugs will also kill the good ones.

Identifying insects can be a challenge, but with today's digital and Internet technology, you can take a picture and send it to your local Master Gardener. Contact your local Master Gardeners at the County Ext. Office by calling (972) 825-5175 or visit www.ecmga.com for help with identification.

Superstars – Strong and Stunning Plants for Texas

By: Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



Turk's Cap—How would you like a plant for your garden that takes full sun to shade, is drought tolerant once established, has showy flowers all season long, attracts hummingbirds and butterflies, and oh yeah, is a native plant so it poses no issues with being invasive? Too much to ask from one plant? Not really.

Turk's cap, known in the scientific community as *Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii*, is a native of southcentral and southeast Texas woodlands where it is usually found in the shady understory. Plants are very site responsive with best growth in partial shade and moist rich soils; however, this homegrown Texas Superstar is tough enough to withstand full sun and occasional drought.

Turk's cap is perennial in our USDA Zone 8a. The dark green leaves are a perfect foil for the bright cherry red, soft pink, or white flowers which resemble miniature Turk's turbans. Plants tend to sucker and form slow growing colonies with upright stems, typically three to six feet tall depending upon the quality of the site. This species typically has rich cherry red flowers, but white forms are available as is the pink flowering cultivar, "Pam Puryear".

Turk's cap is also a fantastic plant for feeding migrating populations of hummingbirds and the small flattened round cushion-shaped red fruit are eaten by other wildlife. Pests are of minimal concern in the landscape, with white flies, scale, and mealy bugs occasionally encountered mostly in nursery or

greenhouse environments.

"Fiesta" is a variegated form with splotchy yellow, green, and whitish leaves, but it requires pruning of reversions to retain its variegation. This native Texas son deserves a shady spot in every Texas Garden.

Angelonia Serena series (*Angelonia angustifolia*)—With the common name Summer Snapdragon, this South American native makes itself right at home in the gardens of Texas. From the hot, humid summers of east and central Texas to the

hot, dry days of the High Plains, this popular summer annual puts on a non-stop show of flowers during the summer season. It has proven to stay more reliably in flower during the growing season.

Serena can be grown from seed and is available in white, purple, lavender, lavender pink, and a mix. It branches well without pinching and grows to 12 to 18 inches in full sun. Serena is drought tolerant, but needs regular moisture. Shearing is not necessary, but can be used to rejuvenate flowering. It can be used in the front of a border, as a ground cover, or as a trailing plant for mixed containers. I purchased Serena transplants and used them in containers last summer. It is one tough plant!

Fragrant "Angelmist" is another outstanding angelonia that has done well in the trial gardens at the Dallas Arboretum. Both are readily available at our local nurseries.

"Baby's Breath" Euphorbias (*Euphorbia hy pericifolia* syn.

Chamaesyce hy-
pericifolia)—Very few euphorbias that are not of the weedy type do well in a hot Texas summer. But a new type of euphorbia has come onto the scene that we call "Baby's Breath" because of the billowing effect that the small white flowers have in the landscape. The profusely flowering summer annuals provide clouds of white flowers all season long that can be used for edging, as a ground cover, for weaving between plants in a border, or in mixed containers.

The cultivar "White Manaus" has been the most vigorous in trials and stands up brilliantly to the Texas heat. "Breathless White" is another strong grower. "Silver Fog" and "Hip Hop" are both smaller types that are best used in mixed containers where they blend and support any plant they are mixed with. They are great fillers for mixed containers as they provide a bright fine texture to the combination. Used alone, they are not showy.

All of these euphorbias are selections of a North American species and stand up to full sun conditions, but will also tolerate some shade. Water use is moderate and shearing is not needed.

"Cool Season" Euphorbias (*Euphorbia martini*, *E. characias* subsp. *Wulfenii*, *E. amygdaloides*, and various hybrids)—There is a cool new Texas Superstar in town ready to add some color to your fall and winter gardens. Enter the Cool Season Euphorbias.

This collection of unique plants provides attractive rosettes of solid or variegated foliage in colors including lime green, cream, pink, and maroon. The flowers on this crop are tall spikes of colorful bracts, which provide months of color in the spring.

Turk's Cap



Angelonia "Serena"



Euphorbia "Hip Hop"



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Landscape Gardening

From: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a website at www.ecmga.com. Check this website for information on gardening in Ellis County, sign up for a monthly newsletter, or access other websites including the Texas A&M Horticulture website. Questions for Master Gardeners will be answered with a return email or telephone call, if you leave a message at (972) 825-5175.

Keys to Proper Landscape and Garden Watering

By Dr. Douglas F. Welsh, Professor & Ext Horticulturist TX AgriLife Ext Svc

In a few months, we will be in the midst of another hot Texas summer, one coming on the heels of last year's poor rainfall record. Properly watering plants during the summer tends to be one of the most confusing and misunderstood of gardening chores. Often, ardent gardeners do not recognize inadequate watering until it is too late and plants are badly damaged or dead.

'How often should I water?' and 'How much should I apply?' are a couple of the most-often asked questions from gardeners. Since water is both essential for healthy plant growth and often costly to apply in quantity during the summer, it is important to get it to the plant's roots efficiently and keep it there.

The following are several suggestions for easier and more effective watering. These techniques apply to all gardening, from shade and fruit trees and vegetable gardens to lawns and house plants.

- ◆ Never water strictly by the calendar. We don't drink water 'every ten minutes' or 'every hour', so why should plants be watered 'every two days' or 'once a week'? Instead, learn to recognize dry plants and soil and use these as your tip-off for watering. Too many factors determine how fast a soil dries for us to put watering on a regular basis.
- ◆ When the plants are dry, water thoroughly. Water lawns so that the soil will be wet several inches down, to encourage deep rooting and drought tolerance. One of the worst mistakes people make in their gardens is trying to 'sprinkle' them each day by using their

thumb and the end of a running hose. Most gardeners just don't have the patience to stand in one spot long enough for deep water penetration.

- ◆ Water trees by taking the sprinkler off the end of the hose and letting water run slowly for several hours out under the drip line (not near the trunk). Be sure that runoff does not occur.
- ◆ Most plants should be watered in the morning. Evening watering increases the likelihood of disease invasion, as the majority of diseases develop most rapidly in cool, moist conditions.
- ◆ While watering your lawn, try to keep water off the leaves of trees and shrubs as much as possible. This is especially important for such plants as crape myrtle and roses, which are troubled by leaf diseases, which spread rapidly on wet surfaces.
- ◆ Symptoms for plants which have been kept too wet are about the same as for those kept too dry. Roots in waterlogged soils die and do not take up water, so plants wilt and turn yellow. Try not to water a drowning plant!
- ◆ Organic matter, such as shredded pine bark and composted manure can increase water absorption when they are worked into our native soil.
- ◆ To keep moisture in the soil, use a thick mulch, such as shredded pine bark, grass clippings, or tree leaves. In addition to reducing evaporation, mulches also keep the soil cooler and make weed pulling much easier.
- ◆ Be especially careful to keep newly planted trees and shrubs well watered. Their developing root sys-

tems are sensitive to under- and over-watering. But again, don't drown them.

- ◆ Always soak chemical fertilizers into the soil immediately after application. These materials are excellent sources of plant foods, but they are also salts, and can pull water out of plant tissues, resulting in burn, unless they are watered into the soil.

Gardeners often wonder what type of sprinkler is best. Generally speaking, most do a satisfactory job of making an even application. However the most efficient and effective type is the impact sprinkler (the kind used on golf courses and athletic fields).

For plants to thrive during the upcoming summer months, they will need plenty of water, but equally important is properly applying the much needed water.

Garden Checklist for April

Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist TX AgriLife Ext Svc

- ✓ 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 four to six 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

(Continued on page 10)

Superstars (Continued from page 8)

These Euphorbia hybrids are hardy from USDA Zone 6 to Zone 8.

They are durable enough to provide winter foliage interest followed by spring flowers either in the ground or in containers without protection from the winter cold. They can also tolerate summer heat and drought. Plant these show stoppers in a full sun location with well drained soil.

They are a great addition to rock gar-

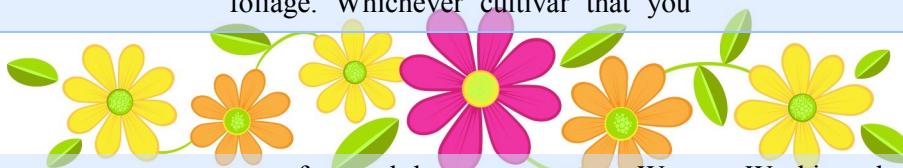
dens, container plantings, or perennial beds. They provide outstanding foliage that mixes well with pansies and other winter annuals, especially in containers. No need to worry about diseases or pests with these tough plants.

For a tight mounding plant, select "Tiny Tim". If you wish to have more of a red or dark maroon color, try "Blackbird". "Rudolph" has dark green foliage with red accents. "Tasmanian Tiger" or "Glacier Blue" is notable for excellent cream and green variegated foliage. Whichever cultivar that you

select, you will find this Texas Superstar will extend your color season.



Visit TexasSuperstar.com for additional details about these amazing stars.



Landscape Gardening (Continued from page 9)

every seven to ten days. Many of the Old Garden Roses and some of the newer ones have considerable resistance to black spot.

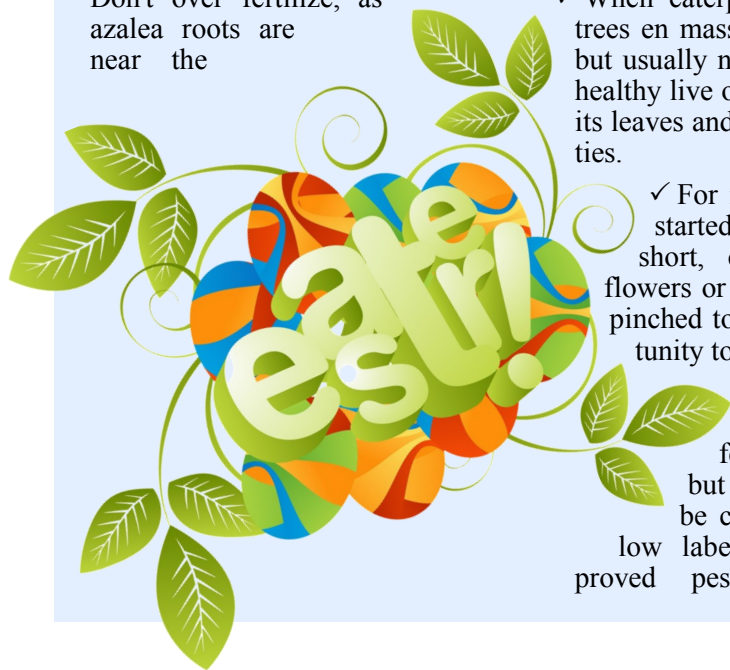
- ✓ Climbing hybrid tea roses may be pruned as soon as they complete flowering.
- ✓ Removing spent flowers, trimming back excessive growth, and applying fertilizer to an established annual bed can do wonders towards rejuvenating and extending the life of the planting.
- ✓ As soon as azaleas have finished 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 regrow 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 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 storing 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 disease are brought into the yard through contaminated soil sources.
- ✓ Watch newspaper and other publicity for information regarding wild-flower trails and open garden days. Plan to take a trip to enjoy beautiful gardens and trails that are abundant in many areas of Texas



Save The Date!
Saturday, March 28, 2015



Straw Bale Gardening—An Experiment in Soilless Gardening

With Susan Norvell
Ellis County Master Gardener



Last September, I had the extreme pleasure of attending the Heirloom Vegetable Festival held in Santa Rosa, CA. The festival was amazing! There was so much to see and do. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and plan to at-

Figure 1-Bales Set-Up – 9/24/13



tend again. The major sponsors of the festival were Jere and Emilee Gettle, cofounders of the Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company.

Baker Creek has the most amazing retail store in Petaluma, CA. One afternoon the group I was traveling with made a side trip to the Baker Creek store. Obviously, the store sells all of the Baker Creek heirloom vegetable and flower seeds in addition to more books on gardening than you can imagine—a veritable Barnes and Noble for the gardener!

While perusing the aisles and aisles of books, I came across the following title “Straw Bale Gardens—The Breakthrough Method for Growing Vegetables Anywhere, Earlier, and with no Weeding”. No weeding? Count me in! Intrigued, I began to look the book over. The book’s author, Joel Karsten, says in the introduction you can grow terrific produce with no soil, no tilling, no cultivating, and no weeding.

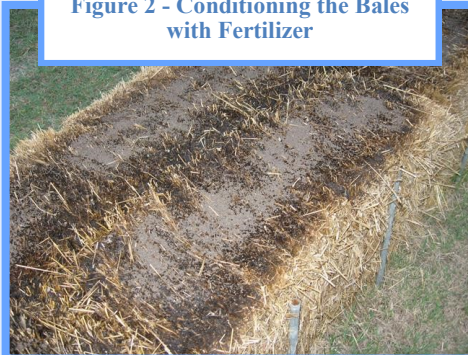
In a nutshell, the book provides detailed plans for conditioning rectangular straw bales, planting with seeds or transplants, and with virtually none of

the back bending labor of most other gardening methods, harvesting wonderful crops of vegetables, fruits, or flowers. According to Mr. Karsten, all you need to be successful are some straw bales, six or more hours per day of sunlight, and water.

He describes the process for “conditioning” (preparing for planting) your bales. This takes anywhere from 12 to 17 days depending on your fertilizer choice. During this conditioning process, the straw begins to break down turning into nutrient rich compost, the perfect planting medium for plants or seeds.

He provides detailed information on planting seeds and/or transplants

Figure 2 - Conditioning the Bales with Fertilizer



along with plant spacing charts. There are lots of wonderful pictures of healthy looking plants growing in straw bales. He tells you exactly how to do it and even has a question and answer section.

If that’s not enough, you can always check out his Straw Bale Facebook page. It sounded so easy and I’ve always been what you could call an experimental gardener. Of course the book went home with me.

I decided to plant my fall/winter garden in straw bales. I love garden experiments and it couldn’t have

come at a better time. My 36’x36’ garden was out of commission for the season. I had planted a cover crop of Elbon rye in an effort to get rid of root knot nematodes and thought I would need to forgo a winter garden this year. I was most intrigued by the “soilless” aspect of this method of gardening. As anyone who gardens in the Ellis County area knows, our soil can be a challenge.

The most difficult part of my experiment came at the very beginning...I couldn’t find straw bales. I knew that I needed to get started on the conditioning process, so I decided to substitute square hay bales instead. I purchased 17 bales and arranged them in a 2x8 pattern as shown in Figure 1.

I then began the process of conditioning the bales for planting. Conditioning consists of applying fertilizer to the cut side (side facing upward) and watering it in. The book contains a table telling you how much fertilizer you need to water in per day to get the bales ready to plant. Organic gardeners take note: it takes a lot of fertilizer to condition the bales; chemical gardeners, not nearly as much. Figure 2 shows fertilizer on the bales during the conditioning process.

Figure 3 shows the bales after planting. Once I had the bales conditioned,

Figure 3 - bales After Planting



(Continued on page 12)

Straw Bale Gardening (Continued from page 11)

I planted broccoli, kale, collards, mustard, and brussel sprout transplants. I also planted lettuce, carrot, and cilantro seeds, and a few garlic cloves. I was interested in seeing how well seeds versus transplants would do in the bales.

The last four bales had seed starting medium added to the top as shown in Figure 4.

I added soaker hoses and held them in place with landscape cloth staples. I did nothing other than water when necessary. Figure 5 is a picture of the garden after about six weeks. As you can see, I was also growing a nice crop of annual rye grass, which was the result of not using straw bales. I'm sure the fertilizer and water helped the rye to flourish. It didn't seem to be interfer-

ing with the growth of the plants, so overall I was pleased.

I'd love to be able to report that my production from this garden was over the top, but that's not really the case. With dry, windy conditions and roller coaster temperatures, nothing really produced to its potential. My production was adequate, but not spectacular.

We just didn't have a very good winter gardening season in this area. There is simply no defeating Mother Nature. I will report that I'm satisfied that I proved that gardening in straw bales is a viable method of gardening. I am going to use the same bales for a portion of my summer garden.

If you think you might be interested in learning

more about this method of gardening and possibly trying it yourself, the Straw Bale Gardening book is available from Amazon.com for less than \$12.00. Here is a link directly to the book http://www.amazon.com/Straw-Bale-Gardens-Breakthrough-Vegetables/dp/1591865506/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1395683782&sr=1-1&keywords=straw+bale+gardening.

In conclusion, this experimental gardener had a successful experiment!

Figure 4 -Area for Planting Seeds



Figure 5 – Garden at About 6 Weeks



What's Happening (Continued from page 7)

tulips, daffodils, pansies, violas, poppies and thousands of other annuals and perennials. Highlights of the festival include the blooming of over 100 Cherry Blossom trees and the mass flowering of 6,000 azaleas. For more info about events and visiting the arboretum, go to: www.dallasarboretum.org/

Saturday, April 19, 9am–12pm, Cedar Ridge Preserve—Conservation in Action Workday. Volunteers help remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. Water, snacks, pruning shears, shovels, and work gloves provided. Location: 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas. Contact: info_CRP@yahoo.com.

Saturday, April 26, 9am–12pm, Dogwood Canyon—Fourth Saturday Workday. Help with trail-building, habitat management and much more. For info, contact Julie Collins at jcollins@audubon.org.

Indian Trail Master Naturalists

For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu

Visit: <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/>

Sunday, April 13, 1:30pm, Wildflower Walk. Members of the Indian Trail Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program will lead a Wildflower Walk at Mockingbird Nature Park. This is a free event open to the public. Please bring drinking water. Corner of Mockingbird Lane & Onward Road, Midlothian.

Monday, April 28, 7pm–8pm, Indian Trail Master Naturalists present “Vines of North Texas” by Master Naturalist Dana Wilson. Dana will introduce you to some of the vines that grow in North Texas and you will learn how to use a dichotomous key to help identify common vines. The program is free and follows the 6pm Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. Meeting Location—First United Methodist Church, Family Life Center 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie, TX. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu

Thank You All!!

**Thanks to the sponsors, exhibitors, and visitors for making the
2014 - 14th Annual
Ellis County Master Gardeners' Lawn & Garden Expo
such a success!**

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