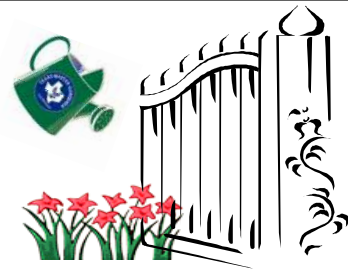




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume V, Issue 11

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

December, 2011

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

Ellis County Master Gardeners' 2012 Gardening Calendar

The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our 6th annual gardening calendar. This year our theme is "various types of gardens". Each month will represent one of these gardens. As always, the calendar will include month-by-month gardening information, soil preparation and fertilizing timelines.



Complimentary calendars available at all sponsors by December 9th!



Listen to KBEC.....

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

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

Melinda Kocian

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Photos by Mox Moxley



Pecan Pie

By Judy Durham

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 cup dark or light corn syrup
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup butter
- 1 ½ tsp. vanilla
- 2 cup coarsely chopped pecans
- 1 unbaked pie shell

In saucepan combine sugar, salt and corn syrup; simmer until sugar dissolves. Meanwhile, beat eggs until foamy. Stir butter, vanilla and pecans into syrup; slowly add eggs. Turn into an unbaked pie shell. Bake 40 minutes at 325° degrees. I sometimes put 1 cup of chocolate chips on the top of the unbaked pie shell before adding filling.

Note: Recipe from LBJ Ranch in Johnson City, Texas.

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

Planting and Sowing

- Decide what trees and shrubs need to be moved to another part of the landscape. They may need more afternoon shade, more sun, or they may have grown too large for the area where they were planted. Wait until January to transplant.
- Plant pre-chilled tulip and hyacinth bulbs promptly after removing them from the refrigerator. Other spring-flowering bulbs can also be planted.
- Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to attract birds to your landscape and for winter color. Some good choices are: possumhaw holly, yaupon holly, Carolina buckthorn, rusty blackhaw viburnum, American beautyberry, coralberry, mahonias and junipers.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Do not top crape myrtles or the central leader of any shade tree.
- Apply a root stimulator such as liquid seaweed or a high-phosphate fertilizer to newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Be careful not to over water winter annuals.

Garden Watch

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight freeze cloth which is available at most nurseries and garden centers.
- Continue to water lawns and newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials if rainfall is insufficient.
- Remove hoses from faucets to avert freeze damage inside your house.

This and That

- The dormant season is a good time to plan what plants to include or eliminate in your garden and what landscape changes you want to make for the coming year.
- Create a wildlife-friendly landscape that attracts birds, bees and butterflies, as well as other creatures, by planting a diversity of Texas native and adapted trees, shrubs, and perennials.
- Choose among an array of draught-tolerant, sustainable plants and those with EarthKind and Texas Superstar designations.

Pecans

The pecan, the only major tree nut that grows naturally in North America, is considered one of the most valuable North American nut species. New research shows that adding a handful of pecans to your diet each day may help inhibit unwanted oxidation of blood lipids, thus helping prevent coronary heart disease.

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



December 2011 Herb of the Month - Mistletoe

Mistletoe is the common name for hemi-parasitic plants (providing some photosynthesis) that invade a host tree or shrub, attach to and within the branches and feed off its nutrients. European mistletoe (*Viscum album*) was believed to cure many illnesses, encourage fertility, banish evil spirits, promote peace, and serve as an antidote to poisons. North American Eastern mistletoe (*Phoradendron* spp.) has been used by herbalists to treat cholera, hysteria, heart problems and nervous conditions. The plants and berries are poisonous and can cause acute gastrointestinal problems in both people and pets. Death may occur within twelve hours. Cattle usually avoid the plant but have died from browsing on the foliage. However, both European mistletoe and the North American species are commercially harvested for Christmas decorations.



Mistletoe plants grow on a wide range of host trees and commonly reduce their growth, but a heavy infestation can kill the tree. In Texas, our native pecan, hackberry, mesquite, ash, oak and

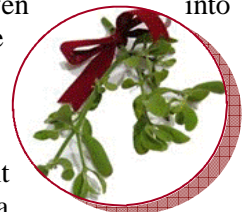
cottonwood are common hosts. Birds and a broad array of animals depend on mistletoe for food, consuming the leaves and young shoots, transferring pollen between plants, and dispersing the seeds. The seeds are coated with a sticky material called viscin which hardens and attaches the seed firmly to its future host. Part of the mystique of mistletoe is that the berries ripen in late autumn and thrive through the winter.



Mistletoe is frequently included in dye books and is said to provide a brown color when chrome or copper is used as a mordant. American Indians used mistletoe to treat toothache, measles and dog bites. A galactoside-specific lectin found in mistletoe, has been used by German researchers in controlled medical experiments with cancer patients who were undergoing other conventional treatments, such as chemotherapy. These studies suggest that the lectin when used as a complementary treatment can improve the quality of life.

In ancient mythology, the sun god Balder was killed by a dart made of mistletoe. The Druids believed the plant was neither an herb nor a tree but grew in midair suspended over the sacred oak, thus a gift from the gods.

Mistletoe was given into the keeping of the goddess of love, and it was ordained that all who came under it should exchange a kiss of peace and reconciliation. By Victorian times, the tradition had evolved into the ritual of the Christmas kiss. The custom is described in 1820 by author Washington Irving in his "The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon".



Mistletoe is the state floral emblem for the state of Oklahoma. The state did not have an official flower, leaving mistletoe as the assumed state flower until the Oklahoma Rose was designated as such in 2004.

Goldthwaith, in the Texas hill country, is considered "the mistletoe capital of the world" because more than a million packages of mistletoe are sent out each Christmas season to cities all over North America.

What's Happening in December

Thursday - Saturday, December 2-4 - Tex-Scapes Greenery - Christmas Open House.

December 1-31 - Ennis Festival of lights

Saturday, December 3, 9-11:30 - Trinity River Audubon Center - *Bird University 101*, 6500 S Loop 12, Dallas, 75217, www.trinityriveraudubon.com. Also check out their ongoing Trinity Bird Count.

December 4-31 - Midlothian Festival of Trees

(Continued on page 4)

December Clean-up

By Carolyn Foster
Ellis County Master Gardener



As fall progresses and temperatures drop, plants that don't die go dormant. This is a time we can catch up on other gardening projects. We can clean up our landscapes and prepare our gardens for spring plantings.

- Clean out blackened stems and foliage of dead plants; they may harbor disease pathogens and insect eggs that can over-winter in the beds.
- While it may appear all activity has stopped, much is going on in the soil until it freezes. Newly transplanted trees and shrubs, perennial divisions and hard bulbs are growing roots, drawing on soil nutrients and moisture around them.
- Earthworms and other microbes in the soil are still producing the organic materials from goodies they are finding in the soil. Summer mulch is decomposing.
- It is important to spread a thick winter layer to protect plants and soil over winter months. Mulching now will help keep the soil temperature even.
- To keep rodents from nesting in the soil, wait until the ground freezes before adding about 6" of mulch. Mulch up to the crown of the plant.
- Mulch perennials around trees and shrub beds.
- Mulch bulb beds to keep soil from shifting and cracking, otherwise shallow bulbs can be heaved to the surface.
- Protect the bark of young trees from gnawing critters by wrapping with wire or tree guard products.
- The last feeding for roses should be 2 months before the first frost. Stop cutting blossoms so new growth will not be encouraged.
- Dig and divide spring and summer perennials now.
- Dig and discard dead and diseased plants. But do not put in compost piles.
- Water trees and shrubs deeply before the ground freezes.
- Feed trees less than a year old.
- Now is also an excellent time to clean, sharpen and store tools.
- Late winter is the best time to prune fruit trees, certain roses and broad-leaf evergreens.

Why do we prune and when should we prune?

Why should plants be pruned?

- Produce more and improve the quality of the blooms and fruit.
- Maintain a desired size or appearance.
- Re-establish a balance between root and branch systems after transplanting.
- Rejuvenate older, neglected plants.
- Repair any injuries to the trunk and branch systems; damaged wood is an open invitation to disease.

When should we prune?

- Fall is a good time to prune certain roses, clematis, hydrangea, crape myrtle, hibiscus, grape vines and small berry fruit.
- Late winter is the time for fruit trees, certain roses and broad leaf evergreens.
- Spring is the best time to remove any wood damaged by winter's wind, ice or snow.
- Summer is the time shear evergreens, hedges and early blooming shrubs after the last flowers fade.

(Continued from page 3)

Saturday, December 17 - 9-2p.m. Cedar Ridge Preserve, Conservation if Action Workday, 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas, 75229. (Always the 3rd Saturday of each month). Wear sturdy boots/bring gloves. Bring a friend! Contact: info_CRP@yahoo.com.

*Check out the Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center at tx.Audubon.org., Tuesdays through Sundays, 9-5p.m., 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. Check out their website for rates, including group rates. Every 4th Saturday is their Volunteer Mornings. For more info contact Dana Wilson at 214-309-5850 or dwilson@audubon.org.

PLANT IN THE FALL --- NATURE DOES

by Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



What a wonderful time of the year. Fall in Texas lasts from the last 90 degree day until the first killing freeze. Cooler temperatures and decreased day length make fall an ideal time to garden. The fall beckons us back to the outdoors to assess our landscaping. What has survived this record summer of heat and drought, and what needs to be replaced? Refreshed, we migrate to nurseries and hurry back home to plant flowers, vegetables, shrubs, and trees. Landscape remodeling or renovation projects abound. Truly the fall may be the best season to plant, surpassing even the spring. The fall months of September through December have distinct advantages for planting compared to the spring months. Fall is a perfect time to plant container-grown trees and shrubs. Restricted root systems of these plants have ample time to recover from transplanting and spread new roots before spring growth begins.



Plant roots grow anytime the soil temperatures is 40° degrees or higher, which may occur throughout the winter in all areas but the Panhandle. During the fall and winter months, the root systems of fall-planted plants grow and become well established. When spring arrives, this expanded root system can support and take advantage of the full surge of spring growth. A well established plant can better survive the heat of summer. The cooler days of fall reduce overall plant stress. Most newly planted shrubs, groundcovers, and perennial flowers benefit from lower fall temperatures. There are exceptions: be careful planting small plants that are marginally cold tolerant for your area.

Rainfall is more common in fall months, reducing the need for irrigation. Rainfall also helps dilute and flush salts from the soil. Salts may have accumulated during summer long irrigation with poor-quality water (i.e., high sodium content). Witness how much better our gardens looked after a couple of fall rains. It's that pure rainwater with no chemicals! Be attentive to watering newly planted trees, shrubs, etc. even through the

winter months if rainfall is not adequate.

For most plants, growth and flowering are induced by fall weather conditions. Roses bloom heavily, and colors are more vivid. Shrubs and perennial flowers may put forth a fall flush of growth. With the shorter days of fall, fall bloomers like candlestick plant, mums, Mexican bush sage, asters, and Mexican mint marigold suddenly come into bloom.

The most important reason to garden in the fall may be a selfish one — we feel human again. Working in the garden is more pleasant in the fall. The heat of summer is in the past. The garden appears more vibrant and beautiful. The birds are more active. The mosquitoes and other pest populations are retreating from the cooler weather. Many plants in a last spurt of energy are producing a high number of seeds that you may choose to save and propagate. There is exuberant life in the garden and a heightened intensity due to pending dormancy. Thank goodness in Texas that winter dormancy is of such short duration.

Also, if you are looking for plants with good fall color, now is the time to select them in the nursery. Take advantage of the clearance sales and auctions offered by your local nurseries and garden centers.

For the skeptical, I urge you to take your cue from nature. Here in Texas, many plants depend on winter root growth for a head start on spring growth. So should you.

For more information on proper planting techniques for trees and shrubs and a recommended list of plant materials for our area of Texas, contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners at www.ECMGA.com or call or e-mail your horticulture questions to us at Ellis-tx@tamu.edu.

The Lure of Fragrance in the Garden

by Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener



Did you ever enter a garden and notice a wonderful fragrance and try to track down the source? Many flowers have fragrance when sniffed up close but some are so aromatic that they can permeate the entire garden. Fragrance has been an important part of gardens forever but modern breeding has favored flower size and colors while too often overlooking scent. Roses are a good example. The spicy richness of 'Maggie', 'Belinda's Dream', and 'Duchesse de Brabant' leave an impression not



easily forgotten.

Sweet Olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) is a small tree or large evergreen shrub that flourishes over much of the South especially in the more acidic soils of East Texas. Its small, creamy white blossoms occur during warm spells all fall, winter and spring and on a still day can be experienced 20 or 30 feet from the source. The same is true of winter honeysuckle, (*Lonicera fragrantissima*). It blooms every year in January and February with lemony scented yellowish blossoms. It is one of the few shrubs that thrives equally well in all areas of our state.



Gardenias are another heirloom favorite. Although they prefer acid soils, gardenias were so highly prized by our ancestors that even in the hot, dry areas of our state they could prosper when the soil was amended with leaf mold, peat moss, or other similar soil amendments. Planted outside your bedroom window it could scent the entire garden and house when at its peak in late spring, early summer.

In South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley citrus is an option. Other areas can grow citrus in containers and provide protection during freezing temperatures. Satsumas, kumquats, tangerines, and grapefruit are all possibilities and they all have wonderfully fragrant flowers. If you have ever been in a citrus grove at bloom time you know that it is a special experience.

Now is a good time to plant narcissus and they, too, are among plants. Narcissus 'Grand Primo' has been around for hundreds of years and is probably another widely adapted bulb now and plant as "drifts" of a dozen or more.



the most fragrant garden of years and is probably another widely adapted bulbs now and plant as "drifts" of a dozen or

Now is also a good time to plant seeds of sweet peas. As their name implies, sweet peas have a wonderful fragrance and are an all-time favorite. In North Texas, wait until late winter to plant them; however, for the rest of the state select a place that has a little protection from the north and prepare the soil by adding compost or composted pine bark along with some cotton seed meal or slow release garden fertilizer. Plant next to a fence or trellis so that the vines will have support. Two favorites that are very old and reliable are 'Painted Lady' (pink) and 'Cupani' (purple and rose). Both are usually available from seed sources. You should have lots of fragrant bouquets by late March and April.

Lawn & Garden Expo

 Save The Date!
 Saturday, March 31, 2012

Lawn & Garden Expo

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 Contact James Kocian at expo.ecmga@yahoo.com
 Reserve the date: March 31, 2012!



Amaryllis Says “Merry Christmas”

By Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener

You don't have to wait till spring to enjoy the beauty of bulbs. Winter flowers can be yours by forcing bulbs — that is, bringing them into their flowering stage inside your home. The queen of them all, the amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) is easy to force.

To get the most from your amaryllis, start with a big bulb. When shopping for your annual amaryllis bulbs, choose bulbs that are as big as your fist or bigger. The bigger the bulb, the more flower stalks it will sprout, possibly up to four. The bulb should be firm to the touch with a brown papery outer skin.

Give it a good home. The amaryllis bulb likes to feel snug in its pot. Use a container with good drainage that is about 6-7 inches in diameter, so the bulb is cozy with about an inch of soil between the bulb and the container wall. Moisten your potting soil in a pan before filling the flowerpot half-to two-thirds full. Place the bulb on the dirt, with the neck pointing up, but leave the neck and shoulders of the bulb exposed and higher than the pot's rim. Gently fill in dirt around the bulb and press with your fingers. Now is the time to insert a 15-inch bamboo stake into the soil next to the bulb. When the flower stalk is heavy with buds is no time to risk piercing the bulb or its fleshy roots with a wooden support. Set the pot in a saucer in a sunny windowsill or direct light at room temperature. When the buds open move the pot from its sunny spot to prolong the blooming period.



Go easy on the water. Water after potting and then only when the soil feels dry on top. After the first bud emerges, water regularly like any houseplant. Do not let the pot sit in water in the saucer. Do not get water down into the “nose” or top of the bulb.

Have patience. Sometimes amaryllis' are slow starters. Allow several weeks from potting to blooming. This may or may not coincide with the Christmas holidays. If it is later, you can enjoy spring flowers indoors while the cold winds and ice (snows?) of January are keeping us inside.

Don't discard your bulb after flowering. When all the flowers on the stalk have finished blooming, cut off the stalk close to the bulb's base. Leave the leaves intact to store up food and energy into the bulb for next year's bloom. Then when all danger of frost has passed, put the plant outside to live until the first frost is predicted next fall. You can take your chances of planting them in the ground. With a mild winter, they may survive to bloom again. If you have left it in its pot, around the first of September, you can set the pot on its side so the soil will dry out. Let it get dry for 4 to 6 weeks, then replot the bulb in new soil. Around Thanksgiving relocate the potted bulb to a sunny location indoors and water as needed to start the cycle over again.

Amaryllis bulbs come in both single and double flowering types and in many colors. Where not so long ago there were Christmas red, snowy white and pink stripes, now you can choose from multiple hues of red, orange and pink and singles, doubles, stripes or picotees (petals edged in a different color).

A particularly fun thing to do when the first bud stalk arises is to “till” the soil in the pot around the bulb by roughing up the surface with a plastic fork. Then use left-over grass seed (fescue or rye work well) from over-seeding your lawn and sprinkle it over the soil. Mist the grass seed (not the bulb or leaves) daily for about ten days and your amaryllis will arise from a bed of grass — both pretty and unusual.



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