

Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume IX, Issue Twelve

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

December, 2016

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** Newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month-by-month agenda of what you should be doing with your landscape. We will feature horticultural articles that we hope you will find interesting, and important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating, and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website www.ECMGA.com and click on subscribe. Best of all; it's FREE! Susan Clark, Editor

2017 Master Gardener Calendar



The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our 11th annual gardening calendar. Our theme this year is "Trees of Ellis County". Also included is a two-page chart of recommended trees, as well as trees NOT recommended and why.

As always, this beautiful and informative calendar includes monthby-month gardening information, soil preparation, fertilization, many of the events of our calendar sponsors, moon signs, as well as other community events.

Your **FREE** copy is now available at all of the following calendar sponsors' locations. Please thank them for being a part of this year's gardening calendar! Without them we wouldn't be able to produce the calendar. And, please shop at their businesses while you are picking up your free calendar.

Merry Christmas to you all! **Ellis County Master Gardeners** and **Sponsors**

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TEXAS A&M GRILIFE EXTENSION



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

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Purple Prairie Clover (Petalostemum purpureum)

An upright perennial grows one to three feet high. The unique lavender-purple flowers are concentrated on slender cones at the ends of wiry stems. The bloom opens from the base of the cone and slowly ascends to the tip. Blooms May to September.

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

Planting

- Plant pre-chilled tulip and hyacinth bulbs mid-to-late month. Plant bulbs in masses, as opposed to narrow rows, for best effect.
- Daffodil bulbs may still be planted. Look for early and small flowering varieties that tend to naturalize and return year after year.
- Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to add winter color to your landscape. Some good choices include possumhaw holly, yaupon holly, Carolina buckthorn, rusty blackhaw viburnum, and American beautyberry. Select plants with the berries on them to know what you are buying.
- * Create a wildlife-friendly landscape that attracts birds, bees, and butterflies by planting a diversity of native and adapted plants. Choose droughttolerant, sustainable plants, and those with Earth-Kind® and Texas Superstar® designations.
- * Considering a living Christmas tree? Choose an adapted plant. Junipers, Arizona cypress, and pyramidal hollies are good options. While indoors, place the tree in the brightest natural light and keep soil moist. Do not leave indoors for more than two weeks.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Apply a root stimulator such as liquid seaweed or a high-phosphorus fertilizer to newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Do not top crape myrtles or remove the central leader of any shade tree. It destroys the crape myrtle's natural shape, and it delays blooming by five or six weeks. If your plant is too tall or too wide, remove or relocate it, and replace with something smaller that won't require trimming.
- Apply two to three inches of mulch around perennial flowers and newly planted trees, shrubs, and vines. It protects against winter freeze damage, conserves moisture, and moderates soil temperatures.
- Remove mistletoe from trees as soon as it becomes visible. Use a pole pruner to remove the entire twig from infected branches before the mistletoe produces berries. There are no effective consumer products to control this parasitic plant.

Garden Watch

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight frost cloth available at most nurseries and garden centers.
- * Continue to water lawns and newly planted trees, shrubs, and perennials if rainfall is insufficient.
- Prepare garden soil for spring planting by tilling in six inches of organic matter (compost, rotted manure) to a depth of eight to ten inches.
- Don't forget our feathered friends especially during the winter when their natural food supply is limited. Providing sunflower, safflower and thistle seed, suet, and fruit will attract many species of birds to your backyard. Also, be sure to provide water.
- * Take advantage of the cold weather to sit down and check out the new seed and nursery catalogues. Order early to ensure availability.

Coreopsis

(Coreopsis tinctoria Nutt.)

Plains coreopsis is seen as large splashes of yellow along roadsides and in fields in spring, especially in relatively moist soils. The plants produce numerous flowerheads on slender, branching stems. Brown centers are flecked with yellow. Ray petals are yellow with a maroon spot at the base, which may be small or may occupy a large part of the ray.

There are many species with several varieties of coreopsis in Texas, often making identification difficult. Although its big show is in the spring, coreopsis will bloom until frost in a year with ample rains. Annual blooms February to December.



Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian

Ellis County Master Gardener





Plains Coreopsis—Sunflower Family (Asteraceae)

Coreopsis tinctoria Nutt.

Region: 1-10 (Ellis County is in Range 8)

Size: 1-4 feet

Blooms: Blooms February – December

Plains coreopsis is seen as large splashes of yellow along roadsides and in fields in spring, especially in relatively moist soils. It is sometimes spectacularly mixed with Texas paintbrush and bluebonnets.



The plants produce numerous flower heads on slender, branching stems. Brown centers are flecked with yellow. Ray petals are yellow with a maroon spot at the base, which may be small or may occupy a large part of the ray. There are many species with several varieties of coreopsis in Texas, often making identification difficult. Although its big show is in the spring, coreopsis will bloom until frost in a year with ample rains.

HOLIDAY TREATS FOR THE BIRDS



It's that time when the Christmas decorations are being hung, presents for family and friends are carefully wrapped and left under the tree! And don't forget to include your backyard birds on your holiday list. Hanging treats outdoors and keeping fresh water available will keep those feathered friends coming to your yard through the cold days ahead.

The following edible ornaments can be made from easily obtained ingredients at home and will attract mockingbirds, wrens, cardinals, nuthatches, and goldfinches to your winter garden.

Orange and Grapefruit Cups: Halve citrus and juice to remove pulp, being careful to keep the skins intact. Prick three equally spaced holes at the top of each cup and string with raffia or florists' wire. Let dry overnight and then fill with seeds, raisins, and millet, and hang on an outside tree.

Cranberry Wreaths: String cranberries on a seven inches length of florists' wire. Form a circle and secure by twisting the ends together. Decorate with a colorful bow before hanging.

Pinecone Treats: Coat pinecones with peanut butter and roll in birdseed. Tie string, ribbon, or raffia around each pinecone and hang in a tree.

Suet Treats: Melt one cup of crunchy peanut butter and one cup of lard over low heat. Stir in two cups of quick-cook oats, one cup of flour, two cups of cornmeal, and one third cup sugar and cool in refrigerator. Put in mesh bags that onions come in. Tie with ribbon or raffia and hang on a tree branch.

Also, provide the birds with nesting materials by hanging a mesh bag on a fence in an out of the way place. Weave in a variety of materials such as: hair from brushes, yarn, string, dried grass, etc. Watch the birds as they come and collect these items to build their nest.

The birds will repay your kindness all winter through with beautiful songs and their entertaining antics. Have a very Merry Christmas!



Photo credit: Wouter de Bruijn via Foter.com / CC BY-NC-SA

Photo credit: Reuben Yau via Foter.com / CC BY-NC-ND

Benefits of Garden Journaling With Cerelda De Heus Ellis County Master Gardener



Every year I say I am going to keep a garden journal and every year I end up relying on my memory. I don't know about yours, but mine isn't that reliable. As a society, we are so busy and trying to do it all, that we remember even less. Trying to recall a specific plant and details from three or four years ago doesn't work for me.

Garden journals are not a new idea. Thomas Jefferson kept notes in a small notebook while out riding and then

transferred his notes to his garden book. To-

day, Monticello and the gardens have been restored based on his garden books. A garden journal is simply a written record of whatever is happening, good or bad, in your garden.

The benefits of keeping a garden journal are many; one central place to record what you planted, did it grow or not, your thoughts and future plans, and so on. First, you must not think of this as another chore. Your garden journal is for your benefit. There

will be no review or a grade. This is a tool to help you, that can be completed however you choose and in a format that works best for you.

Journals can be as simple as adding pages and zipper pockets for garden seed packs or labels to a notebook, or as complete as buying a ready made garden journal, or using an electronic version. The important thing is to try and find one that works for you. If you don't use it, it can't help you with planning and documenting your gardens. Some people like to make notes and then transfer them to their journal at a later time. Pictures and drawings will help make your journal a richer tool for your use.



Detail-minded gardeners might like using graph paper already printed with columns that you can use for recording rain amounts, temperatures, and so forth in a scientific approach. Plant names and results could be listed in this way along with cost info.

Artistic-minded gardeners might like using a blank-paged journal for drawings or doodles reflecting upon daily time spent in their garden. Sketching ideas for a design modification is one way to visually see the change without having to dig and move any soil.

Making a note about friendly visitors are great additions to your journal. A frequent visitor to my garden is a lizard whom I have named Stumpy, as he seems to always be missing part of his tail. I also have a hawk that visits my back gardens. He helps to control the squirrel population, so he is usually welcome for a visit.

Photographs are a great way to show your progress, changes, and the seasons in your garden. A picture is a great way to see just how much work you have done and remember to pat your self on the back.

A vegetable plot diagram can help with crop rotation. Having several years of plans can ensure the best rotation for your efforts. Some people like to include cost of their garden seeds, plants, amendments, etc. Maybe you tried a new product and want to make sure you use it again; a simple note or picture and you have a record of it.

Did you have any pest infestations this year in your garden? If you make a note of it including the pest identity, how you handled the problem and was it successful or not, next year you are ahead of the guessing game.

For those that start gardening early with seeds, documenting the details can be essential to your progress from year to year.

There are many forms of paper and electronic garden journals. Just Google garden journaling and you will have lots of choices. But you can also just as easily start your own with a three-ring binder and some paper. The main thing to remember is this is for your use, no one else's. A journal can be started at any time of the year, so make it work for you. Happy Gardening!



Save The Date! Saturday, March 25, 2017

Winter Interest? Try Purple Muhly Grass

Submitted by Melinda Kocian Ellis County Master Gardener



Purple Muhly Grass (Muhlenbergia capillaris)

Many landscapes look great in spring, but lose a lot of their interest in fall and winter months. Once identified, this problem is easily corrected by adding a few interesting plants.

There are many elements of landscape design. Color, line, balance, proportion, natural transition, and simplicity are all elements to consider in a good landscape design. Movement is another design element that adds interest. This can be accomplished in many ways, such as a circulating pond or a babbling water fall. Movement can also be attained by adding some unique and interesting plants to your landscape.

Purple Muhly Grass is one commonly used ornamental grass that also has many other desirable traits. In late summer through late fall, it explodes into bloom with clouds of pinkish/purple blooms.

When in bloom this plant is billowing and delicate, almost fluid in movement as it adds a dramatic look to your property at a time when pecially stunning. If you have a boring space on your property, this can be an extremely colorful addition and it is very

warm to the eve.

Muhly Grass is exceptionally drought-tolerant, and once established, can usually be watered once a week. It grows to heights of two to three feet with a spread of two to three feet. It prefers full sun to part shade and does best in average to dry soil where there is very good drainage. This plant does not tolerate winter wetness well.

Best of all this plant requires almost no perpetual maintenance as long as its basic watering needs are met and, it is usually free of pests and disease. This is a great plant for xeriscapes. You should cut back dormant growth in winter before new growth begins to emerge in early spring. It can be divided in late fall or early spring. Muhly Grass is rated hardy in USDA Zones 6-11.

In our flower beds, we had two voluntary plants come up elsewhere. What a pleasant sur-

prise! Give this easy to grow, showy grass a try in your landscape. You won't be disappointed!



Become A Member of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Classes begin February 2017

Classes will be every Tuesday and Thursday in February, located at:
First United Methodist Church
505 W. Marvin Avenue
Waxachie, TX 75165.







Be A Community Volunteer Make New Friends And Play In The Dirt!

To find out more contact the office at 972-825-5175



LIVING IN ELLIS COUNTY

Have you recently moved to Ellis County? There are millions moving to Texas from other states. Are you one of them? Or have you lived in Ellis County a while?

Join the Ellis County Master Gardeners, and become a community volunteer and make new friends. We are an educationally-focused volunteer program conducted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of the Texas A&M University System. We are members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flower, and vegetable gardens. We are enthusiastic, willing to learn and help others, and able to communicate with diverse groups of people. What sets us apart from other home gardeners is our special training in horticulture. In exchange for their training, Master Gardeners contribute time as volunteers, working through their county's Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office to provide horticultural-related information to their communities.

Is this volunteer program for you? Do you want to learn more about the culture and maintenance of many types of plants? Are you eager to participate in a practical and intense training program? Do you enjoy sharing your knowledge with others? Do you have time to attend training and complete volunteer service hour requirements? Do you have special interests that could benefit the community or an interest in developing one (e.g., bird or butterfly knowledge, native gardens, wildflowers, etc.)? Do you have a sincere interest in nature or gardening?

Then consider becoming a member of the Ellis County Master Gardeners 20th Anniversary Class to be held in February 2017. Class size is limited to 25. If you are interested, please contact the Ellis County Extension Office at (972) 825-5175 as soon as possible. The deadline to apply is December 19, 2016.

Submitted by Cerelda de Heus Ellis County Master Gardener

Herbs of The Christmas Season, Their Legend and Lore

By Arlene Hamilton Ellis County Master Gardener



ing aromatic incense, without giving much thought to how to church as a marker for the Bible, and its pungent leaves and why these herbal traditions started, or the very real me- were chewed during the long sermons as the minty flavor was dicinal benefits of these holiday herbs, plants, and oils.

Frankincense and myrrh were two of the gifts offered by the Magi to the Christ Child. Frankincense pods and myrrh gum

are both scented plant materials, which may be classified as herbs. Frankincense (Olibanum) is a resin of small thorny trees called Boswellia Thurifera that grow in countries around the Red Sea. Frankincense has been used for centuries in religious rites and as a medicinal treatment for both internal and external ailments. The sap oozes from the trees, forming small white pods that harden upon contact with the air and turn yellow. These pods are then burned for their aroma. The oil of frankincense is calming, soothing, and deepens breathing.

Myrrh gum was used by the Egyptians and Hebrews for incense, cosmetics, perfumes, and medicines. It has also been used as an embalming tool. Like frankincense, myrrh was once considered to be a rare treasure. It is a resin and is derived from the shrub Commiphora, which is found in Arabia and Abyssinia.

Juniper (Juniperus communis) is known in legend and history as the

plant of sanctuary. As the hunted travelers passed, the spiny branches opened and folded them under its needles, protecting the Holy Family from Herod's soldiers.

Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis) is the herb of remembrance and long associated with Mary. The story goes that the flower of the rosemary bush was originally white, but Joseph spread Mary's blue cloak over the shrub as she slept. In the morning, the flowers had turned blue. Traditional legends say that anyone catching the scent of rosemary on Christmas Eve will have happiness and good fortune.

Lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*) is the symbol of purity and is said to have received its lovely scent as the drying rack for the Baby Jesus' swaddling clothes.

Costmary (Chrysanthemum balsamita), also called alecost, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and is also associated with

uring the holidays we enjoy decorating pine trees, hang- Mary Magdalene. Costmary exudes a wonderful balsam scent ing branches of mistletoe in strategic places, and enjoy- and is commonly called Bible leaf. In colonial times, it went supposed to keep the listener awake. Legend has it that Mary created a healing ointment from costmary for various ail-





Rue (Ruta graveolens) is considered to be an herb of grace. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church used brushes fashioned from rue to sprinkle holy water during Mass. Grace is a very important part of Christmas and rue is still used in several countries to make Christmas crowns for celebra-

Santolina (Santolina chamaecyparissus) also known as lavender cotton, is the herb of fair linen symbolizing swaddling cloth.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is a manger herb signifying the courage and strength of Christ. The herb is used to fumigate and clean.

Pennyroyal (Mentha pulegium) is one of the manger herbs. Traditionally, it was planted around doorways and used in bedding and as a strewing herb. In addition to its pleasant aroma, it repels fleas and other insects.

Our Lady's Bedstraw (Rubiaceae)

is another manger herb long used as bedding and animal forage in the Middle East.

The earliest herbal stories of Christmas come from the Holy Land, and begin with the wise men bearing gifts of gold, myrrh, and frankincense to the newborn child. Other holiday traditions, especially those of the Northern regions of Europe, are passed down from earlier times when people survived the dark days of midwinter to celebrate the Winter Solstice and the hope of the rebirth of the Sun and Earth. Many of these stories and legends of miraculous herbs and plants were folded into the new Christmas stories, and all were passed down to us from mother to child, generation to generation, to form our own unique Christmas traditions.

Nativity Photo credit: Waiting For The Word via Foter.com / CC BY Gifts Photo credit: Wiblick via Foter.com / CC BY-NC-ND

Eclectic Gardening

With Jane Slone, Ellis County Master Gardener

THIS MONTH:

Christmas Tree: Real or Artificial



It is the time of year to make the BIG decision about the holiday tree. What type of tree will we have this year? What is best for the environment? Are we saving a tree if we use artificial? The question we could ask is does it do more harm to use an artificial tree instead of a fresh tree?

What happened to the time when parents and their children could go out into their own backyard and cut down a tree? That was not happening for this city girl. A fresh tree had a holiday purpose, and could be used for wood in the fireplace afterwards.

With December here and Thanksgiving behind us, Christmas trees are appearing in stores and homes throughout the country.

Families are preparing for the holiday season. For many, a major theme is the tree.

What is the right choice? Do we purchase an artificial tree and use it year after year or go in search of the perfect living tree?

HISTORY THE **OF CHRISTMAS TREE**

The Christmas tree custom we know today is said to date back to the 1500s when Lutherans in Western Germany would hang wafers on their trees. On the 24th of December, the tree was to

celebrate a religious holiday. Most of us think that this would be for the birth of

This was not their reason, instead it was to celebrate Adam and Eve. The idea was to mimic the "paradise tree", a fir hung with apples that represented the Garden of Eden in a popular medieval play. I am not young, but this is the first time I have found this fact in my research. I grew up believing that we are honoring the birth of Jesus.

In the early 1900s, Theodore Roosevelt banned putting up a Christmas tree for the White House because cutting down trees went against his conservation ef-

forts. In the 1940s, people were still going to the forest and cutting trees.

HOW DO FAMILIES MAKE THAT DECISION?

Growing up, many of us may have never owned a real Christmas tree. Many families bought a fake, pre-lit, easy-toassemble tree and have enjoyed the ease of taking it down and storing it away until next year. The other option was to buy a tree and then decide how to recycle it.

Most of us make the decision based on what type of tree we had when we were young.

SOME MAY GO OVERBOARD

I saw a program on television once where a house had a trap door in the ceiling and they lowered the tree from the attic. All decorated and ready for the holiday. Did they not enjoy taking each ornament and finding just the right spot to show off its beauty? For some of us, those treasured ornaments have great memories for family members. I have one ugly ornament that

has been on our tree for as many vears as I can remember. We hide it toward the back, but it is there.

THE FRESH CUT TREE

So last year I was tempted to get a live tree. I have envied the rich pine scent that filled other families' homes and the needles that fall on the floor, waiting to be swept away. Of course, another thought I had was fresh trees dry out. Faulty electrical outlets and a dry tree could produce a fire hazard and what about the environmental impact? I decided to do some digging.

It is estimated today that no more than two percent of Christmas trees in the U.S. are chopped down from the forest. Most trees are grown on farms and harvested for sale during the holiday season. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, real trees are about three times as popular as fake ones.

However around 2012, the number of trees harvested began to decline. In 2011, 76% of trees sold were real compared to 65% in 2014. Artificial trees are quickly gaining popularity

THE ARTIFICIAL TREE

Most people would be surprised to find that in many ways, artificial trees do more harm to the environment than cutting natural trees. In other words, the idea of artificial trees being eco-friendly is, as a researcher at Kansas State University put it, "an urban myth".

The New York Times wrote an article in 2012 that found most artificial trees contain cancer-causing Polyvinyl chloride (PVC's), which is produced during manufacturing and disposal.







(Continued on page 9)

Christmas Blooms: Pointsettia

By Carolyn Foster Ellis County Master Gardener



It seems another year is about to come to a close. Where did it go? Let talk poinsettias, the flower we see most this time of the year. Bracts are the colored portion of the plant; the actual flowers are the yellow centers. Too much green around the

bracts means it was shipped immature. Buy plants with dense, plentiful foliage down to the soil line. Lots of green foliage means the plant is in good health.

Choose plants that look balanced from all angles; stiff stems, good bract retention, and no signs of wilting, breaking, or drooping. Poinsettias need their space for good air flow.

Don't allow them to get waterlogged or the roots will rot.

Let's go over some poinsettia do's and don'ts. **Do** place plants in indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day. **Do** keep room temperatures between 68 and 70 degrees; water when

soil is dry to touch. Fertilize after the blooming season. **Don't** expose to temperatures below 50 degrees, place near cold draft or near heat vents. **Don't** overwater or allow to sit in standing water. **Don't** fertilize when in bloom.



You can re-bloom poinsettias. In March or April, cut back plants to eight inches, fertilize every two weeks, and continue to water. By the end of May, you will see new growth. Place outside for spring and summer. To keep plant bushy, prune in late June. Keep in indi-

rect sunlight. Transplant with lots of organic matter (peat/leaf mold) when needed. Beginning October 1st, plants must get 14 hours of continuous darkness each night. As nights lengthen, the plants sets buds and produces flowers.

Have a safe holiday!

Photo credit: SarahMcGowen via Foter.com / CC BY-NC-SA Photo credit: zizzybaloobah via Foter.com / CC BY-NC

Eclectic Gardening (Continued from page 8)

The articles state that most trees are not made in the United States and transportation is also an issue.

How much energy is used to transport a tree from China? This is the usual origin of artificial trees. Some of the individuals that sell "fake" trees defend their sales, by saying that we use cars and hunt for the perfect tree rather than going to our backyard and cutting a tree, so what about all those emissions from your car?

EACH PERSON MUST MAKE THEIR OWN DECISION

So, the debate continues. If you buy a fresh cut tree, there are some benefits:

- ◆ Provides oxygen as it grows
- ◆ Can be recycled
- ◆ Is usually grown on a tree farm that would not be used for food production

If you buy a tree that was manufactured and sold from a store:

- ◆ Can be used for many years, saving the trees and land
- ◆ Preserves the environment by not using gas travelling each year to find a tree
- Prevents trees from filling up the landfills after the holiday

There are pros and cons to each side of the discussion. I hope you find this article helpful as you make your decision.

Never leave a tree unattended with the lights on, artificial or fresh.



facebook.com/FireMedicAr

Article sources:

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Thank You All!

Thanks to the sponsors, exhibitors and visitors for making the 2016 Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn & Garden Expo a great success!

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