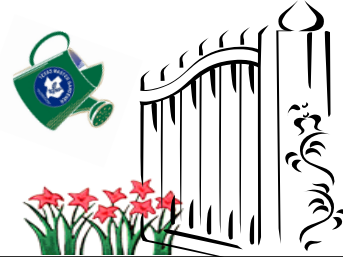




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume X, Issue 12

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

December, 2017

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

## 2018 Master Gardener Calendar

The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our 12<sup>th</sup> annual gardening calendar. Our theme this year is *"Landscapes of Tomorrow – Back to Basics."*

As always, this beautiful and informative calendar includes month-by-month gardening information, soil preparation, fertilization, moon signs, average temperature and rainfall each month, holidays, as well as sponsors' events.

Your **FREE** copy is now available at all of the following calendar sponsors' locations. While you are there to pick up your calendar, please shop at their businesses. You might find just the Christmas gift you are looking for. Also thank them for sponsoring this year's gardening calendar! Without them there wouldn't be a calendar.

**The calendars will be available the 1<sup>st</sup> week in December**

Merry Christmas to you all!

**Ellis County Master Gardeners and Sponsors**

### Waxahachie

Ann's Health Food Center  
Ark Country Store  
Boyce Feed & Grain  
Carlisle GM  
Central Kubota  
CNB Texas  
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The Dove's Nest  
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Earthtones Greenery  
Rigsby Garden Center  
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TEXAS A&M  
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### Listen to KBEC

Saturday mornings at 8:10 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

### Inside this issue:

<i>It's December. What Needs to be</i>	2
<i>Wildflower of the Month</i>	3
<i>Herb of the Month</i>	3
<i>Christmas Cactus</i>	4
<i>Become a Master Gardener</i>	5
<i>Recipe of the Month</i>	6
<i>Amaryllis Says 'Merry Christmas'</i>	7
<i>Garden Checklist</i>	8
<i>Eclectic Gardening</i>	9
<i>Photo Contest</i>	10
<i>Vegetable Gardening 101</i>	11
<i>December Factoids</i>	11

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



### Planting

- \* Plant pre-chilled tulip and hyacinth bulbs mid to late month.
- \* Plant bulbs in masses for best effect.
- \* Daffodil bulbs may still be planted. Look for early and small-flowering varieties that tend to naturalize and return yearly.
- \* Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to add winter color to your landscape. Some good choices include Possumhaw Holly, Yau-pon Holly, Carolina Buckthorn, Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum, and American Beautyberry.
- \* Create a wildlife-friendly landscape that attracts birds, bees and butterflies by planting a diversity of native and adapted plants. For more information, visit [http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_diversity/wildscapes/](http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/wildscapes/)

- \* 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 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) to a depth of eight to ten inches.
- \* Let's not forget our feathered friends during the winter when their natural food supply is limited. Providing sunflower, safflower, thistle seed, suet, and fruit will attract many species of birds to your backyard. Also, be sure to provide water.
- \* Take time during the holidays to check out the new seed and nursery catalogues. Order early to ensure availability.

*The Japanese Maple is a small, deciduous tree with moderate water needs. This tree requires partial to heavy shade and is a slow grower. The Japanese Maple has brilliant fall color ranging from copper, yellow, orange, or red depending on the cultivar. This tree requires good soil drainage and pruning to develop good form. Take care to not damage its thin bark.*





## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



### Purslane – Portulaca Family (Portulacaceae)

*Portulaca umbraticola* H. B. K.

**Range:** 1 – 10 (Ellis County is Region 4)  
**Size:** 2 - 6 inches  
**Blooms:** March through December, Annual

Purslane is the little succulent often considered a weed in the garden, although it can be quite showy on barren, sandy sites where it typically grows. Six species of purslane are known in Texas, some with attractive yellow, orange or pink to purplish flowers. Moss-rose (*P. grandiflora*), with two-inch flowers, is a South American native that has escaped cultivation in Texas. Pussley (*P. oleracea*), thought to be a native of India, has spread nearly worldwide, and has been used as food for over two thousand years. Shaggy portulaca (another name for the species shown), as well as chisme (*P. pilosa*), were collected by Indians and dried to store for winter use.



### Herb of the Month – Mistletoe

*By Arlene Hamilton, Master Gardener*

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.

## October Pop-Up Horticulture Finale



Pop-Up Horticulture made its final appearance of the season at the Waxahachie Farmer's Market on Saturday, October 21. Located under the white tent, Master Gardener Mattie Thompson demonstrated container gardening using a galvanized bucket to create a colorful fall display. Market visitors all agreed that the galvanized look makes for an interesting and eye-catching alternative to the traditional ceramic or plastic pot.



**Save The Date!**  
**Saturday, March 24, 2018**

### Christmas Cactus

By Gail Haynes



Christmas Cactus @CWMUELLER

The Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesi*) is a favorite holiday season house plant, but one which needs careful attention to details if it is to live and flower again the next year. It is closely related to Easter Cactus (*Schlumbergera gaertneri*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncatus*), all with fleshy, flattened, segmented joints, and showy flowers ranging in color from white through pink, red, and purple. These are cacti which in nature live in the crotches of jungle trees, and benefit from light, porous soil mixed with leafmold and sand.

When the flowering period is finished, an active growth period will commence. Keep the plant in a sheltered place until danger of freezing is over. Water carefully, keeping in mind that overwatering is the major cause of failure with Christmas cactus. Soak the potting medium when watering, then allow the plant to become almost dry before watering again. (When the plant is put outside during warmer weather, it will be easier to keep if placed on the porch, or in a situation where it will not be soaked with rainwater over a period of several days). Fertilize with a water-soluble 20-20-20 fertilizer with trace elements while in an active growth stage. Occasionally, leach out excess fertilizer salts with plain water.

Christmas cactus will thrive in a well-drained, sterile potting medium high in organic material. A little sand may be mixed with the medium to provide weight; important as the cactus increases in size. A pH of 5.5 to 6.2 is considered optimum for growth.

Although a temperature of 70° to 80° F during the growing season is considered ideal, plants will tolerate Texas-type temperatures in the 90° to 100° F range, although growth may be slower. Reduce water and fertilizer in August in preparation for the beginning of bud development which is regulated by the shortening of fall days, along with cooler night temperatures. By late October and early November buds should be in evidence. Help to maintain bud set by adequate watering taking care not to expose the plant to cold drafts, unvented heaters, or rough handling. Night temperatures above 70° F may inhibit bud development.

As the cactus becomes larger, shorter tip portions may be broken off and rooted in loose, sandy medium with very little trouble. Mealy bugs, scale, and aphids may be rubbed away with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol. Use stronger controls such as houseplant insecticides only if the infestation appears to be gaining the upper hand. With good tending, Christmas cactus may live for many years.



## Become a Texas Master Gardener



Do you like the feel of the earth between your fingers, the fragrance of growing flowers, the taste of home-grown tomatoes and herbs? Do you want to share your interest in gardening with others? Become a Master Gardener! The Master Gardener Program is a volunteer development program offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and is designed to increase the availability of horticultural information and improve the quality of life through horticultural projects in your community.

What is a Master Gardener?

The Texas Master Gardener program is an educational volunteer program conducted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of the Texas A&M University System. Master Gardeners are members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns, trees, shrubs, flower and vegetable gardens. They are enthusiastic, willing to learn and help others, and able to communicate with diverse groups of people. What really sets Master Gardeners apart from other home gardeners is their special training in horticulture. In exchange for their training, persons who become 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 the Master Gardener program for me?

To help you decide if you should apply to be a Master Gardener, ask yourself these questions:

Do I want to learn more about the culture and maintenance of many types of plants?

Am I eager to participate in a practical and intense training program?

Do I enjoy sharing your knowledge with people?

Do I have enough time to attend training and complete volunteer service hour requirements?

Do I 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 I have a sincere interest in nature or gardening?

### Training

If accepted into the Master Gardener Program you will attend a training course which offers a minimum of 56 hours of instruction that covers topics including: lawn care, ornamental trees and shrubs, insects, disease and weed management, soil and plant nutrition, vegetable gardening, home fruit production, garden flowers and herbs, plant propagation, and water conservation. These courses are taught by specialists in their specific areas. The cost for the course is \$225 which covers the cost of speakers, study materials, and lunch each day.

The Master Gardener training course will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each Tuesday and Thursday throughout the month of February, 2018, at the First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Street, Waxahachie, Texas.

### Volunteer Commitment

In exchange for the training, participants are asked to volunteer at least 75 hours of service by November 30th to earn the title of "Texas Master Gardener". The volunteer time will take place during the normal work week with the exception of the Annual Lawn & Garden Expo which is held on a Saturday in the spring.

The type of service done by Master Gardeners varies according to community needs and the abilities and interests of the Master Gardener. Some Master Gardeners answer telephone requests for information related to gardening. Others staff plant clinics or displays in shopping malls, farmers' markets, or community centers. Master Gardeners may speak to local groups and conduct workshops. They may help establish school and community garden projects, work with 4-H youth, or assist their agent with news or radio releases related to gardening. The Master Gardener Coordinator in the county Extension office decides how volunteer time can best be used.

### Certification

Participants become certified Master Gardeners after they have completed the training course and fulfilled their volunteer commitment.

Note: Master Gardeners are representatives of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. In all volunteer work related to the program, Master Gardeners follow the research-based recommendations of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. The title "Texas Master Gardener" can be used by volunteers only when engaged in Extension-sponsored activities.

If you are interested in the Master Gardener Program and would like an application, please contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Ellis County at (972) 825-5175, e-mail [Ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:Ellis-tx@tamu.edu) or find the application on the master gardener website, ECMGA.com. Applications will be mailed upon request and must be returned no later than January 5, 2018, at which time you will be called to set up an interview.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.



## Featured Recipe of the Month

### Roasted Figs with Fresh Ricotta

By Claire Robinson, Food Network

*Submitted by Susan Ellis*

6-8 figs, halved (recipe calls for Mission figs. I use whatever I can find)

1 T unsalted butter

3 T honey

Pinch ground cinnamon

Pinch kosher salt

Fresh Ricotta (the best) or fat free Greek yogurt, for serving

Preheat oven to 400° F

Put the figs, cut side up, in a baking dish. Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat, and whisk in the honey, cinnamon, and salt. Drizzle the hot honey butter over the figs and roast in oven until very soft, 10 to 15 minutes.

Divide the fresh ricotta or yogurt among four serving dishes and top with the warm figs and sauce.



### Fresh Ricotta

From Good Housekeeping, May 2009

Active time: 5 minutes; Total time: 25 minutes plus standing; Makes 15 ounces or about 2 cups

Cheesecloth

8 cups whole milk (I use 4 cups whole and 4 cups 2%)

Salt

3 T fresh lemon juice

- \* Line a large strainer with 4 layers cheesecloth and place lined strainer in large bowl; set aside
- \* In heavy-bottom 4-quart saucepan, heat milk and 1 teaspoon salt to boiling on medium-high, stirring occasionally to prevent milk from scorching.
- \* Stir in lemon juice (I find I sometimes need a bit more lemon juice to get milk to curdle as I want it); cover and remove from heat. Let stand 5 minutes. With slotted spoon, gently transfer curds from saucepan to line strainer. Drain 3 minutes – or longer if you want dryer ricotta. (I can never remove all curds with spoon. After removed curds have drained to my liking, I move to another container and pour the balance of whey/curds through cheesecloth to capture all. The recipe notes to discard whey, but the whey can be used for other creations if so desired, i.e. in breads, cooking oatmeal, smoothies, etc.
- \* If not using right away, transfer ricotta to clean bowl, cover and refrigerate up to 1 week.



Merry Christmas & Happy Hanukkah from your Master Gardeners

## Amaryllis Says "Merry Christmas"

Submitted by Shirley Campbell



You do not have to wait until 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 six to seven 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 fifteen 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.

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 amaryllises 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. 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 four to six weeks, then repot 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 works 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.



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

Contact James Kocian at  
[expo.ecmga@yahoo.com](mailto:expo.ecmga@yahoo.com)


**Reserve the date: March 24, 2018!**

*Please note, due to there being five Saturdays in March, 2018, there was some confusion on the date of the Master Gardener's Expo this next year. The date has changed two times, but is now correct. The Expo will be March 24, 2018. We hope you join us, and thank you for your support.*



## GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR DECEMBER

by Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist, TX A&M



Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.

Bring in late blooming plants such as decorative kalanchoes or Christmas cactus so they may finish flowering in the warmth of the house.

Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.

Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well lighted window.

Drain gasoline from power tools, and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.

Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.

November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs.

Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons and dianthus.

Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.

Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.

Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.

Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.

Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't over water. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.

Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.

Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted after they have received 60 or more days of chilling.

Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with four or five joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within three to four weeks.

Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.

Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.

Plan now for your spring flowering season with a mixture of annuals and perennials.

Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.



## Eclectic Gardening

With Jane Slone, Ellis County Master Gardener

*WHEN IS A TREE NOT JUST A TREE*



According to the National Christmas Tree Association the trees listed below are all grown and sold as “Christmas Trees” in Texas

<http://www.realchristmastrees.org/dnn/Education/Tree-Varieties>

Cedar Trees Cypress Trees Fir Trees Pine Trees

Many of us research a product before we buy the item. Very few of us research Christmas Tree Farms in Texas, before we shop. You can find several varieties: Leyland Cypress, Carolina Sapphire and Afghan Pine. If you want to visit a Christmas Tree

farm, you can find one in your area by looking on the Internet. Customers choose their own tree. The farm will cut and package your tree. Many of us do not cut and carry a fresh tree home, but we still want that perfect tree.

Artificial trees are everywhere this time of year. As we visit stores in October, we find trees and more trees for sale. These artificial trees have replaced the fresh cut tree in many homes. It is a decision that families makes each year; fresh or artificial. This article is going to focus on the choice and the care of a fresh tree.

Most adults of age remember having a fresh cut tree. They were often used and then discarded on the curb for the trash trucks. Today many choose an artificial tree for several reasons; ease of access and safety. What you decide to have in your house will be determined by several factors. Some of the critical points are listed below.

Determine where the tree will be placed and measure the area. The type of tree is a personal decision, but space will be important for size. Are you going to get a tree that will remain in place until after the first of the year? The number of days from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day is about forty days. This is a long time for a tree to remain fresh. The longer the tree is in a warm house the greater the chance of becoming a fire hazard.

Any action we can take to keep it fresh is important for the tree and the prevention of any type of hazards occurring.



Remember the tree needs to be placed in a stand. When measuring the space for the height of the tree, include the height of the stand in the total measurement.

Without water a fresh tree will become dry and brittle. This increases the chance of a fire. Also, animals may consume the brittle needles, and they can become lodged in the esophagus. Preservatives, pesticides, fertilizers, and other agents, such as aspirin, are commonly used in the tree water to keep the tree fresh. These may have harmful or deadly consequences for cats and dogs (and children) who drink the water!

The fresher the tree the longer it will last. This is important in reducing possible fires that could happen with a brittle tree. Choose a tree that has soft and bendable needles. Do not remove the bark from the tree. By removing the bark the tree will lose moisture and dry out. A Christmas tree will absorb more water during the first few days. It is very important to check it two or three times a day, and keep the reservoir filled with water. If the water level drops below the bottom of the trunk, it will begin to heal over and prevent it from taking up water. A tree may absorb a gallon of water, or more, every day.

Find the perfect tree, decorate, enjoy, and if fresh cut, recycle. Many cities will take in trees, mulch them and recycle. Once the tree has been chipped into mulch, it can be added to the garden. Other ideas for use: cut the trunk into small circular sections and make coasters, or place the tree in a lake where fish can use the tree as a food or shelter source, before it decays. Permission should be given to dispose of a tree in a public water source.

So, when is a tree not just a tree? When it can be used for multiple uses and enjoyment.





## Announcing the Amateur Photo Contest

*Sponsored by the Ellis County Master Gardener Association*

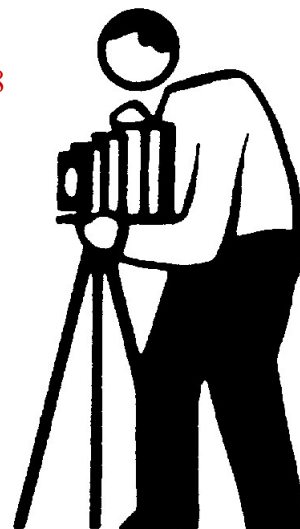
- ⇒ Winners will be announced at the Lawn & Garden Expo March 24, 2018
- ⇒ Two Categories: "Single Specimen" and "In the Garden"
- ⇒ Photos must be submitted by midnight March 10, 2018

Photo Contest Rules with link to entry form

<https://txmg.org/ellis/photo-contest/photo-contest-rules/>

Photo Submission Form

<https://txmg.org/ellis/photo-contest/>



Make an amazing Christmas Wreath to take home for the Holidays! We will have fresh cuttings off of Real Christmas Trees and an amazing selection of Accessories for you to use. Debbie will be there to give you step by step instructions, so you can take home a masterpiece. Fun for the whole family, adults and children alike! \$20 per person. 20 spots only, buy online now by clicking "Ticket Information" above to secure your spot.



Come meet and take pictures with the REAL Santa Claus, and celebrate the Season at Earthtones in our beautiful garden setting. We will be lighting up Earthtones with Christmas lights all over our nursery, making it into a Christmas paradise! We will be collecting TOYS for TOTS, so bring new, unwrapped toys for those less fortunate. For each toy donated you will have a Raffle ticket to win some great prizes, including Huge Trees! We will have Hot Chocolate, Hot Apple Cider, Christmas Music, and S'mores! Plus, we will have a Workshop for everyone to make Gingerbread Houses! Don't forget to Pick out a REAL Christmas Tree from our largest selection ever! Its going to be a Magical Christmas Night!

Earthtones Greenery  
presents...

# Santa's Garden

CHRISTMAS PARTY  
DECEMBER 9, 3-7PM  
with Special Guest  
from the North Pole  
**Santa Claus**  
MEET SANTA FROM 4-6PM

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## Vegetable Gardening 101

*Submitted by Robert Shugart*

One of the most rewarding projects that a person can take on is to start a vegetable garden. It can be as simple as a designated end-of-the-flower-bed to a well-established plot. Whatever you do, get started.



Planning is very important because good preparation will save many hours of labor. Locate the garden where it:

- Gets eight or more hours of direct sun (free of competition from other plants)
- Is highly visible
- Is close to a water source
- Is not a low spot—drainage is important
- Can be planted, tended, and harvested at the right time (for the plant, not the gardener)

Be sure to provide adequate space for things like squash and melons.

The end of the previous season would be a great time to select the area. Don't be too ambitious. The first year a ten foot by ten foot area will keep you busy and supply some nice treats for your table with a few to give to friends.

Next, turn the soil with a spading fork or a tiller. A spading fork will naturally limit the size of your garden! This should be done

in the fall, preceding your spring garden, and should be done several times adding amendments as you go.

Amendments such as leaves, manure, and compost are all "Garden Gold". Adding four inches or more the first season and each fall thereafter is a wonderful way to keep it productive. Take advantage of dry spells during the winter to till and add amendments.

Contact the local Master Gardener office for information on vegetable gardening. Master Gardeners love to talk about gardening, and can provide invaluable information regarding recommended varieties of vegetables, and how to plant and care for them.

Come December order seed catalogues; it's a nice way to spend some cold winter hours. Plan the garden layout. Plan to put tall plants (tomatoes, corn, etc.) on the north side of the garden so you won't shade other plants. Run the rows east and west to provide the most sun exposure per plant. Select locally recommend-

ed varieties to plant (either seed or transplants). Large varieties of tomatoes planted in the northern states are not productive here due to the higher temperatures. The tomatoes we recommend tend to produce medium sized fruit, but in abundance, compared to northern varieties. Most gardeners have favorites. Some like to plant heirloom tomatoes (like Grandma used to plant), but don't expect big yields, though the flavor might be worth it.



Thinning row crops (like beans and peas) is difficult, but necessary to improve yields.

Mulching between rows and around vines can cut down on weeding.

Remember the most important thing that a gardener can plant in the garden is his or her feet!

## December Factoids

**Trees Conserve Energy** – Trees lower air conditioning bills from ten to fifty percent by shading a home from the summer sun. If you plant deciduous trees on the southeast, southwest or west side of your home, you can enjoy shade in the summer and sunshine during the winter. A row of evergreen trees on the north or northwest side can also reduce heating bills by buffering your home from prevailing winter winds.

**Growing Christmas Trees in Texas** can be profitable but requires time (3-5 years) and long-term financial investment to produce high quality trees. Virginia pine is the major Christmas tree species for the acidic soils of East Texas. Afghan pine is the choice for the more arid, alkaline soils in Central and West Texas. Other species planted in limited amounts include eastern Redcedar, Deodar cedar, Arizona cypress, Sand pine and Spruce pine.

## Thank You All!

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

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