



Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VII, Issue Two

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

February, 2013

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

What's Happening in February

In 2013, why not expand your horizons? There are many opportunities in our area for learning more about gardening and the environment. Ellis County Master Gardeners' begin Lighthouse for Learning classes in February. For a complete schedule, see page six. The following organizations also offer classes. Please visit their websites for more information.

BRIT. Classes include: Edible Flowers, Mushrooms, Organics, Herbs, and many more. Visit <http://www.brit.org/events/learners> for more info. Fees vary, some include lunch. Also check the calendar for other events at <http://www.brit.org/calendar/>

The Dallas Arboretum. A few class examples include: Square Foot Gardening, Attracting Birds, Landscape Design, Tomatoes, Organics, Beekeeping, Creative Arts, and many more. Visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/AdultEducation/index.htm> for details and registration. Fees vary.

Garden Inspirations. Classes in February include: Greenhouse Basics, Vegetable Gardening, Jams, Soil Prep, and more. For complete details and to register for classes, visit www.gardeninspirations-tx.com. Class fees vary; some are free.

Cedar Ridge Preserve

7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas

www.audubondallas.org

Saturday, February 16, 9am—12pm, 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. Contact: info_CRP@yahoo.com.

Sunday, February 17, 9am—2pm, Great Backyard Bird Count. Birding counts every hour on the hour. Participation is free with admission (free for members). Contact: Tania Homayoun at thomayoun@audubon.org. For more information about the GBBC, visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>.

Sunday, February 24, 1pm, Trout Lily Walk with Jim Varnum. For more info, contact Jim at jevarnum@aol.com.

Saturday, February 2, 10:30am, Knowing Your Soil with Val Nolen. This class covers a basic understanding of how soil works and how to balance, nurture and protect it, for beginners and seasoned gardeners. The class is free, but please call to sign up. Location: 1007 West Belt line Rd., Cedar Hill. Call (972) 207-2938 to RSVP.

(Continued on page 3)

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



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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Earth-Kind® Raised Bed Construction

- ◆ Soil conditions throughout much of Texas are not well suited for landscape plant materials. Under these conditions the construction/use of raised beds may be the best option for long-term landscape success.
- ◆ Raised beds can range in height from a few inches to several feet. Generally speaking, beds less than 6" in height do little to promote drainage. Beds can be either linear or curvilinear in shape and should complement the overall landscape design.
- ◆ To learn more about Earth-Kind® Raised Bed Construction, go to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/> and click on Landscape Publications.

Tips for Construction

1. Begin the construction process by laying out the beds using landscape paint, a flexible garden hose, string or other marking tools.
2. Next, remove existing vegetation to reduce/eliminate future weed problems. Chemical herbicides (glyphosate) can be useful for broad spectrum control.
3. Removing a 3-4 inch layer of vegetation/sod is also an effective approach. Nutsedge and Bermuda grass are particularly difficult to control.
4. Consider irrigation as a necessary system component. Raised beds work well with conventional overhead irrigation systems or with low volume systems (i.e. drip, porous pipe, etc.).

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

Planting

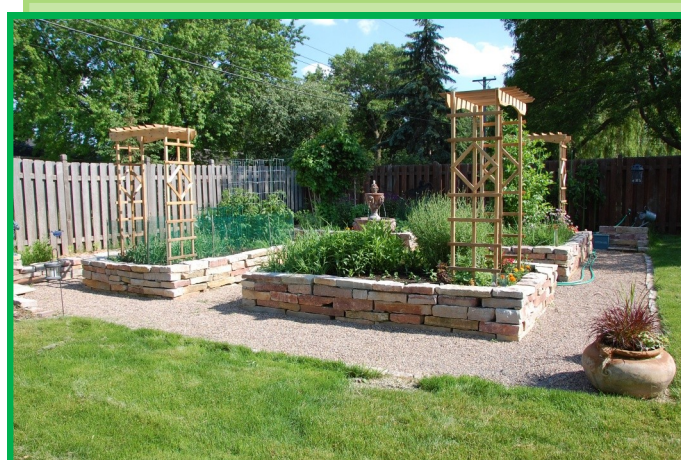
- Plant cool-season vegetable seeds such as lettuce, radishes, carrots, spinach, beets, chard, and turnips directly into garden rows. Plant two to four weeks before the last average frost date, which is March 15th in Ellis County.
- Put asparagus crowns in permanent beds.
- Plant petunias and snapdragons from four-inch pots.
- Add container and bare-root roses to your landscape.
- Plant blackberries, grapes, and fruit and nut trees. For the best varieties, contact Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Ellis County at (972) 825-5175.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Prune bush roses mid-month. Prune back to the ground old, dead, and weak canes. Leave four to eight vigorous canes, removing one-half of their growth above an outward-facing bud. Don't prune climbing or leaning roses until after they bloom.
- Cut old foliage of liriope and monkey grass before tips of new growth emerge. The dead tops of ornamental grasses can be pruned four to six inches from the ground.
- Dig and divide large clumps of warm-season ornamental grasses if the center of the grass has died. Cut back herbaceous perennials to the ground or to the basal foliage.
- Dig and divide fall-blooming perennials such as asters, mums, Mexican bush sage, Mexican mint marigold, and copper canyon daisies.

Garden Watch

- Watch for insects and diseases on fruit and nut trees. Spraying is essential for a successful crop.
- Contact an Ellis County Master Gardener or the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Ellis County for a copy of the Homeowner's Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule.
- Look for aphids and caterpillars on cool-season vegetables. Control aphids with insecticidal soap and caterpillars with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).



Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Drummond Skullcap – Mint Family (Lamiaceae)
Scutellaria drummondii Benth

Region: 1-10 (Ellis County is Region 4)
Size: 6 – 12 inches
Blooms: February – November, Annual/Perennial

Scutellaria is a large, worldwide genus. Fourteen of the American species are found in Texas. Drummond skullcap is a low, bushy, hairy little plant. It has the square, four-angled stems characteristic of the mint family. The small, purple to blue flowers are a half-inch long, and two-lipped. The three-lobed lower lip extends tongue-like, well beyond the upper lip. The center lobe is notable for its purple-dotted white spot and notched tip. The small leaves are oval and opposite. Lower leaves are short-stalked; upper leaves are stalkless. Skullcap is a very common plant, found in various soils, in nearly any sunny location. Although skullcaps belong to the mint family, they are bitter and toxic and should never be used as a flavoring. Their small size, profusion of flowers, and drought tolerance make them an excellent choice for a garden border.

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What's Happening in February (Continued from page 1)

Saturday, February 2, Science Saturday at Botanical Research Institute of Texas. Includes open plant ID, exhibits, demonstrations, and tours from 10am-2pm. **What is a Herbarium class** from 10am-12pm. Register online. **Projects Symposium** from 1pm-2:30pm. Location: 1700 University Drive, Fort Worth. Phone: (817) 332-4441 ♦ Website: <http://www.brit.org/>

Tuesday, February 5, 9am—11am, Twelve Hills Nature Center Workday. Volunteers needed to help plant native grasses and other native plant seeds. Also removal of invasive plants throughout the nature center. Bring tools for weeding and digging -work gloves, trowels, shovels, clippers, etc. and water. Workday will be cancelled if weather is bad. Location: Twelve Hills Nature Center is located in North Oak Cliff, seven minutes west of the Bishop Arts District at 817 Mary Cliff Drive, Dallas. Website: www.twelvehills.org. Contact Marcie Haley at info@twelvehills.org or (214) 941-6069 with questions and to RSVP.

Thursday, February 7, 9am—9pm, Dogwood Canyon—Free First Thursday. Located at 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill, just south of Cedar Hill State Park entrance. For more info, go to: <http://tx.audubon.org/Dogwood.html>

Friday, February 15, 12pm—6pm and Saturday, February 16, 9am—?, Auction at the Greenery. The Greenery will be holding a two-day auction with snacks and drinks served on Friday and catering from Cici's Pizza on Saturday. Preview days are Wednesday, February 13 and Thursday, February 14. Location: 3671 N. Hwy. 77, Waxahachie. Phone: (972) 617-5459 Web: www.thegreenerytx.com

Saturday, February 16, 9:30am—12pm, Plant Propagation 101 at Texas Discovery Gardens. Grow your own plants from cuttings and seeds and save money! Learn easy to implement techniques from an expert in plant propagation, Director of Horticulture Roger Sanderson. Bring home some plant starts to get your garden going! Fee: \$25; \$20 for TDG Members. Register in advance. Location: 3601 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Dallas. Visit TexasDiscoveryGardens.org for info and to register.

Saturday, February 23, 9am—12pm, Dogwood Canyon—Fourth Saturday Workday. Located at 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill, just south of Cedar Hill State Park entrance. For more info, go to: <http://tx.audubon.org/Dogwood.html>

Monday, February 25, 7pm, Indian Trail Master Naturalists presents "The State of Water in Texas, The Good, The Bad, The Ugly". Paul Tishler and Dan Rayfield will present a timely program of information on the state of our water resource in Texas and especially here in the Ellis-Navarro County area. The program is free and follows the 6p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. * **Note new meeting location:** Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Parkway, Red Oak. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



Herbs of the Mediterranean

Many of the culinary herbs that thrive in north Texas trace their roots back to the regions around the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean Basin has a very unique climate found in only a few places in the world. It is sunny, hot, and dry in the summer, with cold and wet winters. The soil is poor, dry, sandy, rocky, chalky (alkaline), hilly, and quick draining. Sound familiar? My garden sits on top of black clay but much of Ellis County fits the description of the Mediterranean area to a tee. Not only do we offer the perfect climate and soil but herbs don't like a lot of fertilizer. So why wouldn't you want to grow these fragrant, tasty delights in your garden? Here are some easy to grow herbs that should be in your garden and used in your kitchen.

Basil is one of the easiest herbs to grow and summer foods require the use of fresh leaves from your garden. Basil does well with hot-weather vegetables

such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. Rapid growth occurs during periods when night temperatures are above 60 degrees so planting should begin in May and June. Like

most herbs, basil is adaptable. Although it likes full sun it will subsist on as little as three to four hours of direct sunlight. The plant will grow best in well-drained, loamy soil that is rich in nutrients. Good air circulation is also necessary. Sweet basil or Genoese is the one preferred in pesto but there are many varieties including cinnamon, lemon, Thai, purple and delicate globe.



Fennel is a beautiful tender perennial growing to a height of 4 feet or more in the southern garden. It's a relative of dill, carrot and Queen Anne's lace. The most common culinary fennels are green, bronze and Florence or bulb fennel. Florence fennel forms a bulb base that can be sliced and served raw as a salad or sautéed and presented as a vegetable. The ripe seeds of the plant add a soft taste of anise to puddings, spiced beets, breads, teas, sauces, liqueurs and Italian sausage. Fennel leaf adds a wonderful flavor to fish and helps reduce the fish odor during cooking.

Oregano and Marjoram are cousins and are generally used together. Often referred to as the pizza herbs they lend their sweet, peppery flavors to tomato based sauces. Unlike basil which needs to be added at the end of the cooking process, marjoram and oregano's flavors develop and deepen as they cook. Combined with tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and zucchini they enrich basic pasta dishes.

Rosemary is a large shrub in Texas gardens. Its evergreen, needle shaped leaves have a pungent pine flavor that is especially good with foods high in fat such as lamb and pork. It can be added to rice, potatoes, breads and stuffing. In the garden give it plenty of room and do not over water. There is also a prostrate or creeping variety that will trail over a wall or garden edge.

Sage, the culinary variety (*Salvia officinalis*) is another herb that helps balance rich foods. It has a strong musky flavor

that combines with thyme, marjoram and savory in fatty fowl and fish. Sage will improve the flavors of soups, tomato dishes, cream sauces and gravies.

Thyme's tiny leaves have a strong flavor

so use lightly. Add thyme to soups, salads, stuffing, sausage, chowder, pork and lamb. Thyme is one of the *fines herbes* of French cuisine and is usually found in bouquet garni. For a different taste, try flavored varieties such as lemon, caraway or nutmeg. Most thyme varieties are low growing compact plants that like borders and pathways.

On Saturday, March 16 Susan Clark and Arlene Hamilton will be featuring Foods and Flavors of the Mediterranean in their noon presentation at the Ellis County Master Gardener Expo. They will be blending herbs with delicious vegetables that also love the Texas soil and heat. The goal at this tasty event is to encourage you to grow herbs and vegetables in your own garden, harvest them and take them into your kitchen to create easy, tasty dishes. The focus is on fun, fast and healthy! So plan to come and join Susan and Arlene in the Crape Myrtle Room for a journey through the Foods and Flavors of the Mediterranean.



Save The Date!
Saturday, March 16, 2013

In the Vegetable Garden

With Robert Shugart

Ellis County Master Gardener



Texas' Favorite Onion

In 1997, Texas officially recognized the "Texas 1015" as the official State Vegetable. This juicy disease-resistant sweet onion was developed by Leonard Pike at Texas A&M.

Hopefully the local stores will have 1015 onion slips the week after Christmas and I try to get them in the ground between rains, as early in January as I can. If a hard freeze is predicted after I get them out I cover up what I can because several hours at 28 degrees and below could cause problems. You may not lose all of them but they won't develop well. Most folks tell me that they will replant after hard freeze damage to help assure a crop. Onions can be planted in our area to mid February

In addition to the 1015, I plant a few bunches of red onions. My experience with these has been spotty to say the least. Last year I left them in the ground for a couple of weeks after I had pulled my 1015 onions and they grew quite a bit more in bulb size. I pull onions when most of the tops fall over but I noticed



that most of the reds had not fallen when the 1015s did. The reds add some pizzazz to salads.

Onions are biennial which means that they grow vegetatively for one season then produce flowers and seeds in the second year. If your transplants are too large (say over 1/4 inch) and are exposed several hours below 45 degrees dormancy will be induced. This means that when warmer temperatures arrive and growth resumes the plants may bolt and seed stems develop. I usually have a few with stems that start to fatten. It's usually late in

the season and I just tear off the affected stem, and leave the plant alone until all are harvested.

Onions do well in this Black Gumbo if it has been loosened up with organic matter over several years. Two to three inches of compost worked into the soil and/or a couple of inches of barnyard manure over the bed will be rewarded. The bed should be above grade to en-

sure that the onions will not stand in water.

Put the plants in three inches apart and an inch or so deep. If your soil is right you can push your finger in to the right depth without much effort. Onions planted too close together can be thinned and used as green onions. Green onions and sweet iced tea make me think of warm weather.

As the season begins to give up the cold days you can fertilize with a high nitrogen fertilizer. Try to avoid a fertilizer with sulfur because the sulfur will make the onions hotter.

Be sure to provide adequate moisture. Bulb size will be reduced if they are moisture stressed. You can reduce moisture when most of the tops fall over.

When most of the tops have fallen over, pull your crop and place them in a dry shady place to dry for a couple of days. You can cut the tops off (leaving about two inches of stem) and spread the bulbs in a well ventilated shady area. I don't cut the tops. I tie the onions, with the tops on, into bunches of four to six and hang them from the rafters of my tractor shed and bring them to the cook as needed.

Good luck!



2013 Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarships

One of the primary missions of the Ellis County Master Gardeners is to build partnerships with the Ellis County community to expand horticultural education and opportunities.

In keeping with this mission, the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association (ECMGA) will again make scholarship funds available in 2013 to deserving Ellis County high school seniors pursuing studies in horticulture related fields.

Scholarships are available in the amount of \$2,000. To qualify, the applicant must be a current or former resident of Ellis County, have an elected academic major in a horticulture-related field that includes, but is not limited to: horticulture, agriculture, environmental science, forestry, botany and entomology, and be able to provide proof of acceptance and/or current registration at an accredited institution of higher learning.

Completed applications must be received by April 2, 2013 to be considered for scholarship award.

Additional information on the scholarships, the application, and award process can be obtained by contacting the Texas AgriLife Extension Office, 701 S. I-35, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX, 75165 or by calling (972) 825-5175. The website is www.ecmga.com.



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 February 25, 6:00–7:30 pm—Vegetable Gardening Want to get started vegetable gardening this spring? Join this class and learn the basics of vegetable gardening. Topics will include site selection, soil preparation, how to plant, what to plant, how to properly maintain your garden, and harvesting tips. Instructors: Susan Norvell and Robert Shugart Cost: \$12.00

Thursday, February 28, 6:00–7:30 pm—Keeping the Garden Healthy Whether you are starting a new garden or making changes to an existing one, this course offers practical advice to avoid problems, recognize a problem if it exists, and use low-impact treatments when necessary. The best ingredient in any garden is a well-informed gardener. Instructor: Maureen Nitkowski Cost: \$12.00

Thursday, March 21, 6:00–7:30 pm—Adding Bulbs to Your Garden This class will deal with the various types of flowering bulbs that are available, how to make the best selections for your garden and location, when to plant them, and how to maintain them. Instructor: Monica Nyenhuis Cost: \$12.00

Monday, March 25, 6:00–7:30 pm—Rainwater Harvesting Homeowners wanting to conserve water and save on bills are looking to rainwater harvesting as an old concept with a new value in a time of water shortage and droughts. Efficient water use is increasingly important to Texas. With a growing population and limited supply of ground and surface water, Texans must use water wisely. Learn how to capture, divert, store, and distribute rainwater for later use. Instructor: Pam Daniel Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 1, 6:00–7:30 pm—Getting Started with Roses This class will deal with the basics of rose gardening for making the best rose selections for our area and your specific garden. You will learn the differences between the major kinds of roses and how to plant and maintain a healthy rose garden. It will also cover when and how to prune your roses. Instructor: Jim Suggs Cost: \$12.00

Thursday, April 4, 6:00–7:30 pm—Herbs, From the Garden to the Kitchen Of all the plants you can grow in your garden, herbs are some of the easiest, especially in the Ellis County area. Our dry, rocky soils make for good ground for these useful plants. Not only are they attractive and easy to grow, they are of great use in the kitchen. This class will teach you what to plant, how to care for it, and how to bring your herbs into the kitchen to make tasty and healthy dishes. Recipes and handouts included. Instructor: Susan Clark Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 8, 6:00–7:30 pm—Attracting Butterflies to Your Garden Do you want to learn how to attract more butterflies to your garden? Join us for this informative class. You will learn what butterflies are in our area and what plants you will need to add to your garden to attract the various types of butterflies. Learn the difference between host and nectar plants and why you need both in order to have the most butterflies. Instructor: Carolyn Ross Cost: \$12.00

Thursdays, April 11- May 2, four classes, 6:00–8:00 pm—“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. Instructor: Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources Cost: \$22.00

ECMGA Amateur Photo Contest

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association announces its annual photo contest is under way beginning September 1, 2012. **Last date for submissions is March 1, 2013.**

Grab your cameras and get out in your yard, garden, and Ellis County and take your best shot! **You can submit up to five photos**, so you may want to submit photos from different seasons, as well as, your personal favorite. Vegetables and summer garden pictures are great, but don't forget to include beautiful fall and winter photos, too. Please **do not include** people in your photos.

For contest details and submission of entries, go to **Photo Contest** at www.ecmga.com. There is **no cost to enter** the contest, and photographers can enter up to **five photographs per category**. Prizes will be awarded to first, second, and third place in each of two categories: “single specimen” and “in the garden”. Each winner will receive a gift certificate from one of the following businesses: Roland's Nursery or The Greenery in Waxahachie or EarthTones Greenery in Midlothian.

Chinese Pistache...from ugly duckling to beautiful swan

By: Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



The name is unusual, but the performance is outstanding. Chinese pistache (pronounced pistach') is known as *Pistacia chinensis*. This is one of the few non-natives to make the "Top 10" list of landscape trees for Texas. Highly recommended for many years by horticultural experts at Texas A&M, Oklahoma State and Kansas State universities, this native of China possesses a number of special advantages:



Regarded by many knowledgeable horticulturists as one of the most beautiful, pest free and easily maintained shade trees for the Southwest and Gulf Coast regions.

Winter hardy to central Kansas, the pistache forms a spreading, umbrella-like canopy which at maturity is 40-50 feet high with a width of 30 feet. This is an ideal size to provide shade, enframement and background for single-story homes.

Medium to fine textured foliage (an asset in smaller landscapes) that creates a light-textured shade pattern.

Foliage that remains an attractive, deep green color during the growing season, even in the rocky, highly alkaline, horribly abused soils common to many new home sites across Texas.

Spectacular fall color in shades of orange, red-orange and even crimson, often rivaling the show of sugar maples in the Northeast. In addition to its brilliance, this tree is also one of the most dependable sources of fall color in the lower South.

Very acceptable growth rate for such a long-lived species, with 2-3 feet of growth possible each year with good

management.

The first shade tree to receive the coveted "Earth-Kind" designation and "Texas Superstar" designation from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for its high levels of genetic resistance to insect and disease problems.

Extremely hard, durable wood, which is also very decay resistant, helps protect tree from wind, ice and vandal injury.

Superior drought, heat and wind tolerance once tree is estab-

lished (that is, after 2 or 3 growing seasons).

An extremely tough, durable and adaptable medium-size tree which is tolerant of both urban and rural conditions.

Fruit set, only on female trees, consisting of clusters of small, round green berries which turn red to reddish-purple (pictured right) in the fall.

These fruit clusters make excellent table decorations. And while inedible for humans, the fruit is relished by birds.

Buying Tips and Care

Trees 6-8 feet in height, trunk diameter of 1.5 inches, container grown, are probably the ideal size for most homeowners to purchase.

There can be seedling variation in fall color of pistache, with color intensity normally ranging from good to spectacular. By shopping in the fall when

most pistache are exhibiting their fall color, you can easily select a specimen with the most attractive foliage coloration.

Select a planting site in full sun, and at least 15 feet from your home and 40 feet from other trees to provide sufficient room for future growth.

Pistache grows in any type soil; try to avoid heavy clays that hold water.

With your fingertip, check moisture of the root ball weekly. Water only when top inch of soil is dry.

Mulch immediately after planting. Beginning early spring, make light but frequent applications of fertilizer.

Although considered by many experts to be near perfect for this area, the Chinese pistache does have a couple of minor faults. First, young pistache in 5-gallon containers (a nice size to

purchase) are often rather awkward and gangly in appearance. Rest assured that after five to six years of tender loving care in your landscape, this "ugly duckling" will have

been magically transformed into a most "beautiful swan" as its canopy develops and begins to mature. Secondly, you may want to nip the growing tips out of the tree one time to force it to produce side shoots and new branches. Even without such pruning however, the vast majority of pistache will eventually make very nicely shaped trees on their own.



Texas Native Tree: The Mexican Plum

By Marilyn Simmons
Ellis County Master Gardener Intern

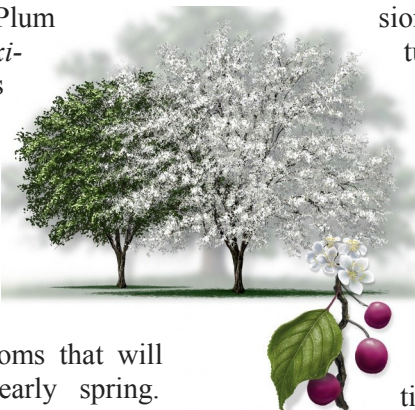


If you are wanting an early spring color in your landscape, let me suggest our Texas Native, the Mexican Plum

(*Prunus Mexicana*).

This tree will add much diversity to any garden. Watch for a cloud of white fragrant blooms that will appear in early spring.

This 15-to-35 foot tree will be showy for a week or two. In mid-summer, the mauve turning to purple plums attract a variety of wildlife, mammals, and birds. This tree will be buzzing with honey bees, especially through the duration of its blooms. The leaves sometimes have a felt-like texture on the top sides. Our smaller plums grow in thickets, unlike the well behaved Mexican Plum.



Copyright © Robert O'Brien

Space trees 20 feet apart. It can be used as a great understory tree with deciduous leaves. The leaves occasionally show some fall color by turning yellow before they fall.

These trees are prolific in Ellis County and bloom simultaneously with the redbuds. It is easy to locate these trees that grow in the wild, by watching for their showy spring color. They will grow in full sun, dappled shade and part shade. Propagation takes place by double-stratified seed, and cuttings. They are found in river bottoms and prairies in Piney Woods, Post Oak Woods, Houston Blacklands, and Edwards Plateau Northern Mexico. They grow in a wide range of soils, sand, loam, clay, limestone and well-drained soil.

Take note of the trunk of this tree as it matures. The satiny blue-gray will become darker and sometimes the bark will peel much like the birch tree.

The Mexican plum tree can stand alone in the landscape, or it can be massed for a large scale dramatic effect. Scattering Mexican plums and Red Buds in a wooded area will provide a picture-perfect scenery.

Our property came with a few Mexican Plums and every year I anticipate

the arrival of spring and the spectacular show of this beautiful Texas native.

Information for this article was taken from Native Texas Plants, by Wasowski.



The Ellis County Master Gardeners would like to extend an invitation to those who might be interested to work alongside them in the public gardens. This will be an educational opportunity to ask questions, to learn firsthand practical gardening techniques, and to get to know your local master gardeners.

Each month, the workdays will be posted in the newsletter. You may be familiar with some of our gardens and maybe not. There are contact persons listed next to each project so you may get more information. Please join us when you can!

February Workday Schedule

Monday, February 4, 9am	Greenhouse	Jim Dockins: (214) 405-2268
Tuesday, February 5, 9am	Butterfly Garden	Dan Griffin: (214) 403-4451 Judy Griffin : (972) 742-7769
Thursday, February 14, 9am	Presbyterian Living Classroom	Sandra Jones, 817-899-8689 Jean Wammack, 972-742-2798
Tuesday, February 19, 9am	Midlothian Ridgeview Park	Cheryl Sandoval: (214) 675-9238 Ruth Davis: (214) 632-9398
Thursday, February 21, 9am	Veteran's Memorial	Jim Goss: (713) 305-9851 Judy Shelton: (972) 617-0355
Tuesday, February 26, 9am	Chautauqua/Triangle Garden	Shirley Campbell: (972) 937-1084
Thursday, February 28, 8:30am	Getzendaner/Star Garden	J.R. McMahan: (214) 957-3252 Lu Millican: (970) 560-2030



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.

Garden Checklist for February

Dr. William C. Welch, *Professor & Landscape Horticulturist Texas AgriLife Extension Service*

✓ If you have ash trees in your landscape, keep an eye open for the Emerald Ash Borer (*Agrilus planipennis*), an insect invader from China that has killed many thousands of ash trees in the eastern United States, and is approaching our region. The Texas Forest Service has recently begun a monitoring program in a number of counties that may become affected by the half inch long beetles. If you discover any beetle you think may fit the description, please contact Joe Pase (East Texas) at 936-639-8170, jpase@tfs.tamu.edu or James Houser (Central Texas) at 512-339-4589

jhouser@tfs.tamu.edu. To see pictures search on the internet for "Emerald Ash Borer Tamu".

- ✓ Now is an excellent time to select and plant container-grown roses to fill in those bare spots in your rose garden.
- ✓ When pruning shrubs, first prune out any dead or damaged branches; then thin out by removing about one-third of the canes or stems at ground level, removing the oldest canes only; and last, shape the rest of the plant, but do not cut everything back to the same height.
- ✓ Water foliage plants as well as other

containerized plants only when needed and not by the calendar.

✓ Climbing roses should be trained, but not pruned. Weave long canes through openings in trellises or arbors and tie them with jute twine or plastic/wire plant ties. Securing canes now prevents damage from winter winds, and contributes toward a more refined look to the garden when roses are blooming. Wait until after the spring flowering period to prune climbing or once-blooming shrub roses.



plants and practices for the Texas landscape

Landscaping for Energy Conservation

Earth-Kind® landscaping is a research-proven method for energy conservation to improve our environment. Planning a good Earth-Kind® landscape with particular attention to placement of trees, shrubs and vines that surround the home and other structures can reduce utility costs, reduce maintenance costs, and increase real estate values. (Some estimates reported 25% increase)

Trees providing shade to a home from the afternoon sun in the summer can

reduce inside temperatures by about 10 degrees. Using medium to large deciduous trees (those that lose leaves in winter) will also benefit the home in the winter by allowing the warmth of the sun to filter in. Small trees and large shrubs can be used to shade the walls of the home with similar results.

Vines can be trained on walls or pergolas to shade a deck, back porch or west side of the house. Service areas such as air conditioning units, trash bins or compost areas can be concealed with a wall of wooden planks gapped to allow air circulation.

These simple, but effective practices will save money, time, and resources.

Incorporating them into your landscape routine is an investment in the environment and the future.

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Valentine's
Day

