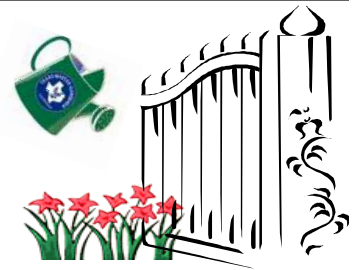




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume IV, Issue 1

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

February, 2010

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month by month agenda of what you should be doing to your landscape. We will be featuring horticulture articles that we hope you will find interesting, important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website www.ECMGA.com, click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE!

Melinda Kocian, editor

What's Happening in February?

Lighthouse for Learning

With the Ellis County Master Gardeners and AgriLife Extension
(for reservations, call Melissa Cobb @972-923-4631, ext. 142)

Monday, February 22, 6-7:30pm - *Square Foot Gardening & More*, **Instructor:** Ginger Cole, \$11.00. For beginning and experienced gardeners who would like to plan the best use of available space for gardening.

Thursday, Feb. 25, 6-7:30pm - *Butterfly Gardening*, **Instructor:** Nancy Prikryl, \$11.00. Learn how to develop a beautiful and effective habitat in your yard that butterflies can't resist.

Monday, March 1, 6-7:30pm - *How to Plant a Successful Vegetable Garden*, **Instructor:** Susan Norvell, \$11.00. Covering a wide variety of important topics on successful vegetable gardening.

Monday, March 8, 6-7:30pm - *Rainwater Harvesting*, **Instructor:** Pam Daniel, \$11.00. For home owners wanting to conserve water and save on bills.

Monday, March 29, 6-7:30pm - *Getting Started with Roses*, **Instructor:** Jim Suggs, \$11.00. Session will cover site selection, soil preparation, plant selection and planting. Disease, insects, watering, fertilization and more.

Monday, April 5, 6-7:30pm - *Growing Perennials*, **Instructor:** Shirley Campbell, \$11.00. Learn which perennials will take our summer heat and clay soil, including the latest *Flameproof* and *Arboretum-approved* perennials from their trial gardens.

Monday, April 12, 6-7:30 - *Smart Gardening in Ellis County*, **Instructor:** Maureen Nitkowski, \$11.00. Start smart by knowing soil, climate and pests. Stay smart with plant selection, monitoring and sanitation.

4 classes each Monday, April 5-26, 6-8:00pm - "Ag 101" - *Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners*, **Instructor:** Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources. Cover topics on soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management.

(cont'd on page 2)



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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Mark Your Calendars!

The 2010 Ellis County Master Gardener's EXPO is set for Saturday, March 27th at the Waxahachie Civic Center.

Anyone wishing to become a sponsor or an exhibitor of the 2010 Expo, can find additional information on our website: www.ECMGA.com or contact James Kocian: 972-814-0699, or expo.ecmga@yahoo.com.

Keynote Speaker: Neil Sperry!

It's February - What Needs to be Done?



Texas Bluebells (*Eustoma Grandiflorum*)

Photo by Linda Moxley

Texas native wildflowers add color and interest to gardens, yards and fields from early spring to late fall. To ensure blooms the following year, mowing should be halted till the seeds have formed and dropped to the ground. Typically, native wildflower seeds are planted in the fall. However, because winters may be too dry or glacial, you may want to replant in February or March. Remember, seed to soil contact is required for germination

Planting and Sowing

- Sow cool-season vegetable seeds directly into well prepared garden rows. Cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, kale and potatoes should be planted 4 weeks before the last average frost date which is March 15 in Ellis County. Lettuce, radishes, carrots, spinach, beets, chard and turnips should be planted 2 to 4 weeks prior.
- Container and bare root roses can be planted this month.
- Plant blackberries, fruit and nut trees. Contact the Ellis County AgriLife Extension office for the best varieties.
- Plant gladiolus corms and cool season annuals such as petunias (4" pots), snapdragons, Iceland poppies, larkspur, ornamental chard and English daisies.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Prune bush roses on Valentine's Day, February 14. Prune back to the ground, old, dead, and weak canes. If necessary, don't hesitate to use hedge trimmers before using hand shears or loppers. Fertilize with compost or aged manure. Leave 4 to 8 vigorous canes removing one-half of their growth above an outward-facing bud. Prune climbing or leaning roses later after their blooming period. It's ok to prune errant canes to retain shape of the plant.
- Cut or mow liriope before tips of new growth emerge. Cut back old foliage of ornamental grasses to the ground; Mexican feather grass only if needed. Division and transplanting of large clumps of warm-season ornamental grasses can be done now.

Garden Watch

- Begin controlling insects and diseases of fruit and nut trees. Spraying is essential for a successful harvest. Contact an Ellis County Master Gardener or your County AgriLife Office for a copy of the "Homeowners Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule".

This and That

- Dig, divide, and transplant fall-blooming perennials such as asters, mums, Mexican bush sage and Mexican mint marigolds (tarragon),
- Cover tender plants with landscape fabric in case of frost or freeze.

Tips for February

Native plants, while being adapted to local climate and soils, also support populations of native birds, beneficial insects, and other animals, thus promoting a healthy community of organisms.

What's Happening in February (cont'd)

Friday, February 12, noon to 5pm, (Preview Wed. & Thurs. Feb. 10-11), - **2-Day Auction**, The Greenery, Waxahachie, . Free BBQ and drinks

Saturday, February 13, 9am-? - **2-Day Auction**, The Greenery. Preview Wed. & Thurs. Feb. 10-11. Free BBQ and drinks

Monday, February 15, 7pm - Garden Inspirations, **What is Compost Tea?** - Why does this work? How does this work? This is a seminar explaining what compost tea is, how it is made, when it is used, why it is used and we will take questions on the subject. 108 Ridge Crest, Waxahachie, TX, marilyn@gardeninspirations-tx.com or 214-497-3918, for directions.

Saturday, February 20, 10:00am - ?, **All-Day Organic Day**, The Greenery. Free classes and snacks.

10:00 - Organic products in the Metroplex

11:00 - Antique Roses, Mike Schoup

12:15 - Break for lunch - **RSVP** for meal by Feb. 3rd., Marilyn @ 214-497-3918

1:15 - Roses and Edible Flowers, Arlene Hamilton

2:30 - Organic Procedures, Lucy Harrell & Taylor

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Garden Dreams

Lawn & Garden Expo, March 27th

By Pat Dockins, Ellis County Master Gardener



I'm Dreaming Of - No, not of a white Christmas, but of gardens filled with tomatoes, peppers, squash and beans; of beautiful flower gardens with butterflies fluttering about and bees a buzzing.

If you're a gardener like my husband, Jim and I, on these cold dreary days we start dreaming of planting our own garden and also plants for sale at the Lawn & Garden Expo.

As we ponder over seed catalogs, questions arise like, "should we try this variety?" Or, "How about this variety, it worked well last year." "Look at this one; let's give it a try".

The 2010 Lawn & Garden Expo sponsored by the Ellis County Master Gardeners will be held on Saturday, March 27. In the plant sales area we will have a nice variety of tomato and pepper plants along with the perennials that we sell.

This year the variety of tomatoes we will be offering are *Better Boy*, *BHN 444*, *Celebrity*, *Champion II*, *Early Girl*, *Homesweet*, *Juliette*, *Porter*, *Sungold* and *Sweet Million*. **Better Boy** has large crops of bright red 12-16 oz. fruit that is smooth and flavorful. It is one of the best tasting tomatoes available. **Celebrity** is a 1984 All-American Selections Winner. This plant produces exceptionally flavorful fruit 8-12 oz. and is outstandingly disease resistant. It produces large clusters of consistently large, beautiful tomatoes. **Early Girl** is our favorite; it produces heavy yields of meaty, red fruits, 4-6 oz. It's the first of the season to produce and last year was still producing at the time of frost. In fact we pulled all the green tomatoes and are still enjoying them as they ripen.

Among the cherry varieties we have, *Juliette* is a favorite of many. *Sungold*, a very early and heavy cropper and *Sweet Million*, a super-sweet cherry variety that is disease resistant.

Now to go along with those tomatoes every gardener should have some peppers. Among the peppers we've selected this year in the sweet-bell category are old favorites, *Big Bertha* and *California Wonder*. We've also ordered seed for yellow and orange peppers that we hope to have ready in time to sell. In the non-bell category we offer *Sweet Banana* and *Pimiento*. If you want hot, we'll have *Jalapa*; a variety of jalapeño.

The bells, *Big Bertha* and *California Wonder*, start out in a deep green and turn to red as the fruit matures. **California Wonder** has a blocky shape that makes it a nice stuffer. **Sweet Banana** is a very popular pepper; excellent, fresh or cooked. **Pimiento** is heart shaped, mild and as the fruit matures turns from dark green to deep red, making it ideal for salads, garnishes and canning. **Jalapa**, named for the Mexicana town where jalapeño peppers originated is our offering for hot peppers. It has compact plants with high yields.

So, come on down to the Expo, March 27, and we will have lots to entice you. If our tomatoes and peppers don't, we're hoping our beautiful perennials will.



ECMGA Offering 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 Gardener's Association will again make scholarship funds available in 2010 to Ellis County high school seniors and college students pursuing studies in horticulture-related fields.

Scholarships are available from \$1,000-2,000.

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.

Applications must be received by April 1 to be considered.

Additional information on the scholarships, the application and award process and the application can be obtained by contacting the Texas AgriLife Extension Office, 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3 or call 972-825-5175, fax 972-825-5184. Visit online at <http://ellis-tx.tamu.edu/>, then click on publications.

Vegetable Gardeners Monthly

by Rick Daniel

Ellis County Master Gardener/Vegetable Gardening Specialist

Hello, and welcome to the February edition of the Vegetable Gardeners Monthly. If you have questions that this article doesn't address, just give us a call at 972-825-5175 or contact us via the web at www.ecmga.com and ask for one of your Master Gardener Vegetable Gardening Specialist.

For February, be sure your garden is prepared and ready to plant. Clear all old vegetation and till in compost and well rotted organic matter such as manure and leaves; the earlier the better. Now is the time to take in your power tools for service and repair before they get too busy. Check out your irrigation system, such as drip or sprinklers and be sure that all areas are getting watered effectively. For those of you using drip irrigation, be sure each plant has multiple drip heads. If you use only one drip head per plant, your root systems will not develop properly, as the roots will only grow where there is water.

Plant your onion sets or transplants early this month, but wait until mid month or later for other cool-season vegetables, such as beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, English peas, lettuce, potatoes, radishes, spinach and turnips. Cucumbers can be planted late month. One to two year old asparagus roots can be planted as well.

Featured Vegetable of the Month

By Rick Daniel
Ellis County Master Gardener



Onion: Vegetable of the Month



Planting dates: plant transplants in late winter or very early spring. Sets and plants can be transplanted February 1 to March 17.

Planting method: When using transplants, choose plants only ½ inch in diameter or less. Fall transplants will probably be harvested as green onions in winter. For big onions, plant transplants with 8-10 inch spacing in December. When sowing seeds, sow the previous year in September up until October 1. Planting too early and exposure to cold temperatures causes seed stalk development.

Varieties: **Yellow:** Texas Supersweet, yellow Granex **Red:** Red Granex, burgundy, **White:** Crystal white, white Granex. If an onion is listed as a long-day variety, it bulbs when it receives 15-16 hours of daylight. Short-day variety bulb with about 12 hours of daylight and are used in southern areas for

winter onion production

Culture: Soil should be healthy and well drained. Add lots of compost and organic fertilizer. Soil needs to be kept moist, not too wet, just moist. The size of the bulb is determined by how much green top the onion has. During a mild winter, freezes won't damage young onions and they can be left until spring.

Fertilizer: Heavy feeder. Apply before planting and side dress 3 weeks after transplanting and again when bulb enlargement begins. Use 2-3 cups of organic fertilizer per 10 feet of row 16 inches wide. Don't fertilize if their tops have started to fall.

Harvest: For green onions, harvest when tops are just inches tall and for bulbs, harvest after two-thirds or more of the tops have fallen over. Do not wait more than 1-2 weeks after this occurs. Allow time for thorough drying before storage. Store in a cool, dry place.

(Continued from page 2)

Cedar Ridge Preserve - for more info: contact Jim Varnum, 214-543-2055 or jevvarnum@aol.com.

Saturday, February 27– 10:00am and 1:00pm - Geoffrey B. Stanford Trout Lily Walk (2). Description: Trout lilies, or white dog-toothed violets, are the harbingers of spring in the plant world. These flowers in the lily family bloom from just mid-February to mid-March. Walk with Jim Varnum, Master Naturalist approx. 1 hour.

Saturday, April 10, 10am - Wildflower ID in the eastern prairies.

Saturday, May 8, 10am - Milkweeds and painted buntings in the western prairie.

Saturday, February 27, 9am - ? Organic Education Day, EarthTones Greenery in Midlothian. **Laura** from Flower Wood (Southern Living Plants) showing upcoming and new plants. **Les Martin** will be talking about perennials and **Gary Harrell** on organic products.

Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



February - Wait and See Month

Having spent the past week surveying the damage to my herb garden caused by the extreme cold, this month's column will cover what you should and should **not** be doing in your herb garden.

February is always my month of "wait and see". There are many herbs listed as "Tender Perennials" in North Texas that will not survive three days and nights of below freezing no matter how much mulch you applied or how carefully you covered your plants. Then again we gardeners are naturally full of hope. Isn't that one of the definitions of a gardener? Following are my plans for herb gardening in February.

Basil is long dead so if you haven't cleaned up the dead stalks pull them out and toss into the compost. If the plant flowered and set seed in the late summer you may be surprised with some new plants emerging in late April or May.

Bay trees show some damage to the most outer leaves but I will leave that alone until after our last frost date. We don't want to encourage new growth with winter still here.

Chives, both onion and garlic, are a slimy mess right now but new growth will emerge with warmer days. Don't uncover until late February or March.

Cilantro, dill and parsley: I always plant seeds in the fall and enjoy adding a few sprigs of these early greens to salads in February and March. Unfortunately these little babies did not survive the cold. So I will reseed this month. If it remains cool the seeds will not germinate until we are into longer periods of warm weather. As I've told you before, I'm a lazy gardener, so I scatter the seeds directly on the prepared soil, cover with a light layer of top soil and go back to my rocking chair. Some of the seeds will make it, of that I am sure.

Green and Bronze Fennel are up about twelve to eighteen inches and don't seem to have been bothered by the cold. In addition to great anise flavor this plant is a favorite dinner for the black swallowtail butterfly caterpillar.

We will have a pity party for my **Lavender**. No matter what, I can't seem to keep it alive. The late heavy rains last fall stressed all of the plants and one by one they curled up and died. I don't believe the freeze had anything to do with their demise. The only one still looking healthy is the Spanish lavender which is recommended for its beauty in the garden not its aroma.

Lemongrass always looks dead now but do not remove the long dried grass until after our last average frost date, around the middle of March; then cut back. New shoots will quickly appear.

Oreganos in my garden were the surprise loss. I grow many varieties and all suffered damage to their leaves. Peeking under the dead leaves I see good green growth so expect the plants to survive but I will wait until late in the month to trim back by about one third.

Rosemary plants are showing damage also. The creeping varieties are more susceptible to freeze damage and may need to be replaced, but upright rosemary should need just a good haircut later to stimulate new growth.

Sage plants will need to be cut back in late February or early March. New growth will appear as the days get longer and warmer.

Thyme should have enjoyed the cold snap. The leaves tend to turn red in the winter and the flavor is not as intense but a trim and warm weather will get the flavorful oils flowing.

So again, as you have heard from the other Ellis County Master Gardeners, February is a time of wait-and-see. There is work to be done but patience is the key to success in the spring garden.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



White Dogstooth-Violet

Erythronium albidum Nutt.

Lily Family (Liliaceae)

Size: 8-10 inches

Blooms: February-May, Perennial

White dogstooth-violet is a small plant that forms extensive colonies, spreading from underground shoots. A bare stem produces a single-flower that hangs over, with its petals curved back, skyward. The nodding flower seems too large for its slender stem. Its six petals are yellow on the inside, but are white to a lovely pale violet on the outside. Leaves are three to eight inches long, tapering at both ends. They have thick blades, and are mottled purple-brown or light green. A plant with one leaf is immature, but plants with two leaves are mature and will flower. It has been reported that Indian children relished its crunchy, mild-flavored bulbs in the early spring, but these have never been a major food source. White dogstooth-violet is found on rich, moist loams, along slopes, sometimes under brush, or in shaded areas.



Landscape Gardening

By Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener



The 2010 Master Gardener Expo will be on Saturday, March 27, 2010 at the Waxahachie Civic Center. Some of the perennials that are growing in the Greenhouse for sale at the Expo are:

Achillea Moonshine – Yarrow: a beautiful combination of pale and bright yellow flowers; grows 12-18" high, space 18-24" apart.

Artemisia Powis Castle: Finely textured, deeply cut silver foliage; aromatic; grows 3' high by 3' wide.

Asclepias Curassavice (Milkweed) Bloodflower: orange and red host plant for monarch butterfly; attracts hummingbirds and butterflies; grows 4' high by 2' wide.

Buddleia Royal Red: Large deciduous shrub with long fragrant flower trusses from spring until first frost. Thrives in full sun or part shade in moist soils. Attracts butterflies; grows 4' high.

Callirhoe Wine Cup: A hardy, drought tolerant, sprawling perennial. The flowers close each evening and remain permanently shut after pollination; grows 1/2-1 1/2' high.

Caryopteris Longwood Blue: Summer display of pure blue flowers; grows 4' high by 4-5' wide.

Cestrum Orange: A slender shrub with long, ovate dark green leaves and open clusters of orange-yellow, tubular flowers; grows 3-5' high, spreads 3-4'.

Coreopsis Sunray: a double flower more orange than yellow in color; grows 8-10" high with bloom heads reaching to 18 inches.

Echinacea White Swan: A compact cultivar that is quite prolific with very sturdy stems, fairly well reflexed ray florets and disc flowers that start green and progress to a deep orange/yellow; grows 24-36" high and 24-36" wide.

Turks Cap Big Mama: A red and red-orange plant that is attractive to bees, butterflies and/or birds; grows 4-6' high, space 4-6' apart.

Salvia Greggii Raspberry: This bright raspberry colored dwarf semi-woody perennial is suited for dry garden areas; grows 3-4' high and has a long flowering season.

Black Foot Daisy: Evergreen white perennial that attracts butterflies during a long flowering season; grows 1' high by 2' wide.

Phlox Nicky: Hardy perennial with showy clusters of magenta pink blossoms blooming in the summer; grows 3' high by 2' wide.

Rudbeckia Cherokee Sunset: This Rudbeckia contains a blend of sunset colors; yellow, orange, bronze, mahogany and shades of these colors. The 3-4" flowers are double or semi-double and long lasting as cut flowers; grows 24 to 30' high, spreading about a foot.

Veronica Georgia Blue: An old-fashioned perennial that attracts butterflies and blooms from March through September; grows 6-24" high by 12-18" wide.

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ONE THING I KNOW FOR SURE

By Judy Shelton, Ellis County Master Gardener



One thing I know for sure: Nothing beats homemade peach preserves for breakfast, especially with homemade biscuits.

Five years ago we moved to Waxahachie into a seven-year old house with an acre of sorely neglected landscaping. The turf was hard baked weeds and the flower beds were overgrown, overplanted shrubs, but there were three peach trees in the back yard that, come summer, produced a glorious crop of beautiful, healthy peaches. That year, the family made gallons of delicious peach preserves and spread the wealth to friends and family. For the next five years, we, my husband and I, spent hours of backbreaking labor, and too much money on water, fertilizer and chemicals, to the end that we now have mostly nice thick grass, many new trees, manicured beds and guess what? Since that summer, not a single healthy peach has come from my back yard, and so I have decided to make my peach trees my first personal master gardener project.

After studying the "Homeowners Guide to Pests of Peaches" pamphlet from the A&M Extension Service, which we were given during class, I have decided this is what I must do.

During dormant season, two weeks ago, I sprayed with 97% dormant oil to kill scale insects. Also at this stage, but two to three weeks later, I will spray to control leaf curl. That means this next week.

I found traces of borers on the trees last summer so an application of pyrethrum should be applied five days after first bloom, but since this will likely kill honey bees, I will apply again in late August to avoid this application the next season.

Fourteen days after bloom, I am going to use a combination of captan, which is a fungicide to control brown rot, malathion and continue that treatment every fourteen days until within fourteen days of harvest. Hopefully, this should eliminate brown rot and the plum curculios worm.

So come July, I should have enough peaches for another batch of preserves. If that's not the case, then this second thing I know is true. I will surely try again next year.

(Continued from page 6)

Garden Checklist for January 2010

- Continue to water and fertilize cool-weather annuals such as Flowering Tobacco, Bells of Ireland and Stocks to encourage the best blooms.
- Now is an excellent time to transplant mature or established trees and shrubs while they are dormant.
- Make flower and vegetable garden plans now before the rush of spring planting. Time spent in armchair gardening before the fireplace will pay off in improved plant selection. Besides, it is fun to page through the garden catalogs.
- Sow seeds in flats or containers to get a jump on plant growth before hot weather arrives. Petunias, begonias, and impatiens should be sown in early January. Warm temperature plants, such as tomatoes, peppers, marigolds, and periwinkles, should be sown in late January or early February.
- Apply a light application of fertilizer to established pansy plantings. Use one-half pound of ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet of bed area. Repeat the application every 4 to 6 weeks, depending on rainfall. Dried blood meal is also an excellent source of fertilizer for pansies.
- Prepare beds and garden area for spring planting.
- Check junipers and other narrow-leaf evergreens for bagworm pouches. The insect eggs overwinter in the pouch, and start the cycle again by emerging in the spring to begin feeding on the foliage. Hand removal and burning of the pouches are ways of reducing the potential damage next spring.
- The life of the plant received as a Christmas gift can be prolonged with proper care. Keep the soil moist, but provide drainage so that excess moisture can flow from the pot. Keep the plant out of range of heating ducts and away from heating units. Keep in a cool room at night, preferably at 60° to 65°F.
- 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.

It's February - What Needs to be Done

By Susan Norvell, Ellis County Master Gardener



This is a good month to think about, plan and prepare your gardens for this spring and summer's plantings. Plan ahead and decide what you want to plant, and then order any supplies needed, if you purchase from gardening catalogues. This would also be a good time to begin to assess any damage that may have occurred to your landscape due to our extremely cold weather last month.

For you vegetable gardeners, if you haven't already done so, now is time to till your garden and get it ready. It's getting close to past time to get your onion sets in the ground so if you want to grow onions, get your sets in now. If planting asparagus, use two to three year old roots and plant them in well prepared, permanent locations in your garden.

Later in the month you can now sow lettuce, radishes, carrots, spinach, beets, chard, turnips and cucumbers in your garden. It will also be the time to sow cool season vegetable seeds directly into your garden soil. Cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and potatoes should be planted four weeks before the last average frost date, which is March 15th in Ellis County

For your perennial gardens, consider using native and adapted plants, as they will reduce or eliminate the need for pesticide spraying and heavy fertilization. Plants labeled EarthKind have been tested and proven under all growing conditions, and are very hardy.

In Ellis County, roses need to be pruned by mid-month. Different types of roses require different types of pruning, so if you need assistance, contact your Ellis County Master Gardener Association rose experts for advice at 972-825-5175. Generally speaking, cut out dead, dying and weak canes. Leave 4-8 healthy canes, while removing about one-half of the canes growth above an outward-facing bud. Wait until after the spring bloom to prune climbing and "once blooming" roses. Local nurseries should have a wide variety of roses in stock now, so it's time to pay them a visit if you want to add new roses to your landscape.

If you've been procrastinating, now is the time to get your garden tools ready to go for this year. Unless you do it yourself, get your power tools to your local repair shop for a tune up. If you wait much longer, it might take you a while to get them back, as they get real busy around the first week of March.

Now is the time to complete any unfinished pruning of shade, ornamental and fruit trees. Be sure to remove that pesky mistletoe from your trees. Left unchecked, it will enlarge and cause distorted limb growth and weaken your trees. Birds will spread it by eating the berries.

Start planting your gladiolus corms and Dahlia tubers. Fall-flowering perennials such as mums, and Mexican bush sage should be dug and divided before spring growth gets in the way.

Water wise tip of the month: Plan your flowerbeds so that plants with similar water needs are planted together, thus eliminating over and under watering of some plants. Rainwater harvesting is a great way to save water. The Ellis County Master Gardeners have information on how to catch rain and save it for future watering needs. We also offer classes on rainwater harvesting. We hope to have a couple of rainwater demonstration sites you can visit, completed in the next couple of months. Stay tuned for details.

Texas Rainwater Catchment Association (TRCA) 2010 State Conference

By Rick Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener
TRCA Board of Directors/Webmaster



The Texas Rainwater Catchment Association (TRCA) is pleased to announce that we are holding our 2nd Annual State Conference in Kerrville, Texas on March 12th and 13th of 2010. The mission of TRCA is as follows: The mission of the Texas Rainwater Catchment Association is to provide Texas citizens with credible information and resources on rainwater collection, to promote the advancement of rainwater conservation and to work with state, county and other local government units in promoting rainwater catchment. The agenda of this conference has been put together with that mission in mind. The agenda for Friday the 12th is targeted towards the rainwater professional, while the agenda for Saturday is targeted towards the general public. All are welcome to attend either day. There will also be tours to visit rainwater catchment systems installed in the local area.

We hope that all you Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists who have attended "Rainwater Specialist" training, as well as all others who have an interest in rainwater catchment will attend. Come and support our new organization and help to ensure our success!

For more information, agenda, registration and TRCA membership application, please visit our website, www.texrca.org.

LEAVES, LEAVES AND MORE LEAVES

By Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener



They keep falling and falling; the leaves that is! If you are as allergic to raking as I am, I have several thoughts on what to do with those leaves. The first and easiest is to run your mower over them with the mulching blade working away. I set my height on the mower one level down from where I usually mow so it gets all the bits and pieces. Even if you don't have a mulching mower, just block the throw vent or let it spread the chopped leaves for you. These bits and pieces will compost themselves over the winter keeping your grass roots warm and feeding them too! The mowing part is to speed up the decomposition and keep the bigger leaves from forming a water repellent mat on your lawn and beds.

Actually I do use my rake to pull the bigger leaves from my beds onto the yard so I can get at them with my mower. I don't catch my own leaves ever, but I do chop and catch my neighbor's bagged leaves to put back on my flowerbeds! I really appreciate him having his leaves bagged so neatly that I can throw them out on my driveway, set my mower down as low as it will go, and chop away. The chopped leaves go straight onto the flowerbeds or into an old 30-gallon trashcan and will end up as part of my compost pile. I have even been known to pick up a few extra bags from good looking (leaf-free) yards around town to put beside my out buildings for future use. If the leaves are bagged, they can be chopped and used any time.

If chopping is not your thing and you want to make compost, try the "bag" method. Add one cup of high nitrogen fertilizer (21/0/0) and one to two gallons of water to a black bag of leaves (heavy duty sacks only!). Tie up that bag, stick it out of the way and let it work nature's wonders through the winter! The leaves will begin to compost and if they are already chopped it will be much finer compost. They can be used come spring on most new beds and dug in or just dropped on top. One reason such a big deal is made about using leaf compost is that our plants usually know what they need to grow well even if they can't tell us. The leaves themselves contain most of the missing elements; thus the reasoning that our local composts and mulches are the best kind for our plants. Think about the forest and how well it uses its leaves for compost!

You can learn more about compost and all sorts of other gardening related things. Call the Ellis County Extension Office at 972-825-5175 or log onto our website at www.ecmga.com.



Ellis County Master Gardener Selling Cool Season Plants at the Lawn and Garden Expo

By Homer McCain, Ellis County Master Gardener



These are some of the plants that will be available at the Ellis County Master Gardener Lawn and Garden Expo plant sale on March 27th.

Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum majus*) — Although often considered as a fall and winter season annual, snapdragons will do better planted in the spring in this area. They can be planted in the fall, but normally will not survive the winter in North Texas.

Plant them right away in full sun or partial shade for early spring color. They will tolerate our alkaline soil, but it is recommended they be planted in well-drained beds that have been amended with organic matter and expanded shale. Since the last average freeze date for this year occurs around March 17, you should enjoy them until hot weather arrives.

Snapdragons can also be planted in containers in the spring and fall. In the fall, they are frequently used with other cool season annuals such as pansies, Swiss chard, ornamental kale and dianthus. They will have more impact if planted together as a single color; however, they can also be used in a mixed-color scheme as well. "Snaps", as they are often referred to, come in a wide range of colors: red, white, yellow and purple, as well as shades of these colors.

They originated from the Mediterranean region. The name comes from the shape of the flower which appears like a dragon's mouth. By pinching the sides of the flower lightly with your finger and releasing, the jaws will snap open and shut — a feature that amuses young children.

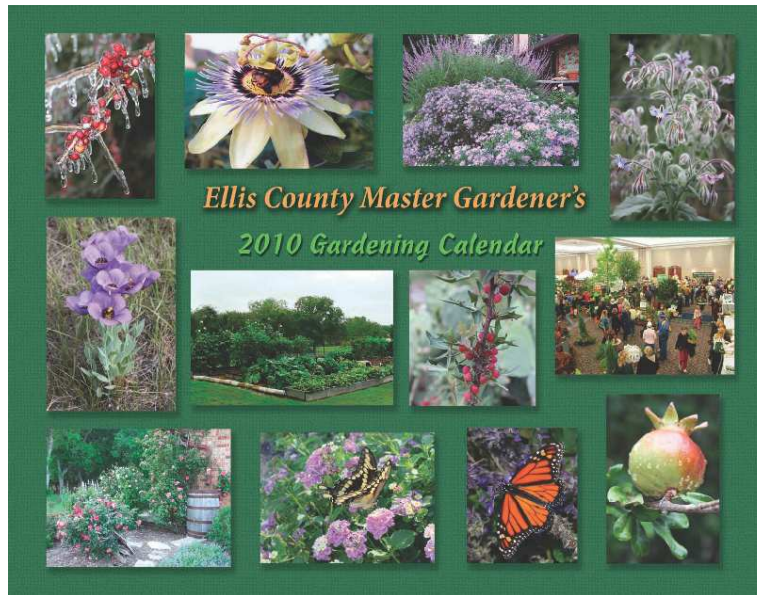
Dianthus (*Dianthus*) — This is another cool season plant that will also be for sale. Planted in the fall they will bloom until spring in mild winters. They are a low growing, mat forming plant with grey-green leaves. Their small carnation-like flowers are borne profusely often covering the entire plant. Deadhead (removing dead flowers and seed heads) after blooming in the spring and cut the foliage back by about half to encourage additional flowering until summer. They may bloom intermittently during the summer, but they are mainly a cool season plant that needs full sun and good drainage. Flower color ranges from white to pinks, reds, and purples. Some flowers are bi-colors.

Stock (*Matthiola incana*)

Stock is another plant that likes cool weather. It is a plant that is not commonly found in this area; it is an annual planted in the fall or late winter. It needs afternoon shade. It has tall, erect spikes of white, red and pink and can be used in well-prepared beds or in containers with other cool season plants as mentioned above.

If you have never grown these cool season plants before, the EXPO is your opportunity to try some.

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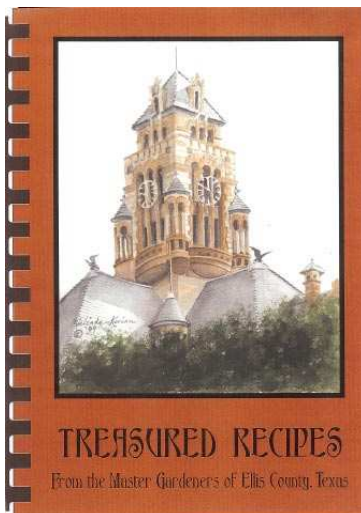
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