



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VII, Issue Five

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

May, 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](http://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 May

### **IT'S BACK! Every Saturday from March to December from 8am–1pm.**

410 S. Rogers (across from City Hall in the old lumberyard building)

Visit the Master Gardeners' Booth!

- ☼ Useful gardening tips
- ☼ Plants and herbs for sale
- ☼ Free handouts...Some items for a fee
- ☼ Tell a friend to sign up for the **E-Garden Newsletter**... it's **FREE!!!**



**Sunday, May 5, 12pm–5pm, Cinco De Mayo Celebration at Weston Gardens.** Free samples of non-alcoholic margaritas, salsa and chips, teas, and one pepper plant. Triple Weston bucks when you make a purchase. All 4" tomatoes and peppers are 50 cents each! Please RSVP to let them know you will be attending. Call (817) 572-0549 or email [wes-ton@westongardens.com](mailto:wes-ton@westongardens.com). Weston Gardens is located at 8101 Anglin Drive, Fort Worth.

**Sunday, May 19, 2pm–7pm, Sustainable Day with Garden Inspirations.** Bringing Sustainable Education to you...an afternoon of workshops ending with a community dinner! \$19 per person. For information and registration for this event and other classes in May, visit <http://gardeninspirations-tx.com/>

**Monday, May 20, 10am, Wildflowers & Bird Walks.** Members of the ITMN Program will be leading combined Wildflower and Bird Walks at Mockingbird Nature Park, located at 1361 Onward Road in Midlothian. Free. Participants should bring drinking water and binoculars for bird watching. For more information, visit <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/> or email: [Information@itmnc.com](mailto:Information@itmnc.com)

**Monday, May 20, 7pm–8pm, Indian Trail Master Naturalists presents "Bobcats of River Legacy Parks".** Dr. Richard Ashley of Fort Worth Christian High School will present a program on the River Legacy Parks, a 1,300-acre urban oasis that follows the curves of the Trinity River in north Arlington, and its' ecological diversity of bottomland forest, wetlands and prairie. The program is free and follows the 6 p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. It takes place at the Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Parkway, Red Oak. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email [ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:ellis-tx@tamu.edu)

**Cedar Ridge Preserve**  
7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas  
[www.audubondallas.org](http://www.audubondallas.org)

**Saturday, May 11, Registration: 7am–10:30am/Prize Drawing: 11am (You must be present to win.) Third Annual Walk On The Wild Side Hike-A-Thon at Cedar Ridge Preserve.** \$20 per person, \$5 per child (6-12 years old), Children 5 and under are free.

(Continued on page 8)

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI LIFE**  
EXTENSION



### **Listen to KBEC.....**

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

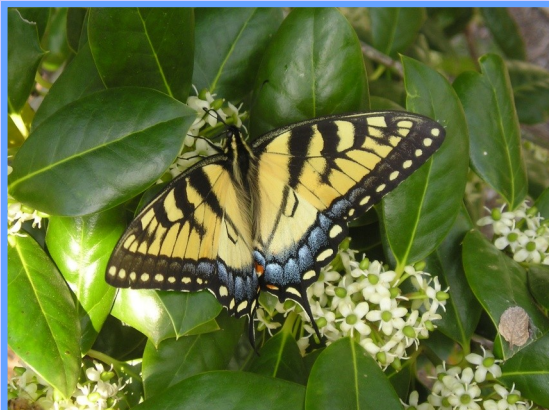
The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a 5-minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian

### **Inside this issue:**

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### Earth-Kind® Native Habitat

- ◆ Creating 'backyard habitat' through the use of native and well adapted plant species not only provides habitat, but also assists in reducing water use, as well as, the need for potentially harmful chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Texas Wildscapes, coordinated by Texas Parks and Wildlife, is one of the most popular and successful native habitat projects for commercial and residential landscapes.
- ◆ To learn more about Earth-Kind Native Habitat, click on the Resource tab at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) and click on Earth-Kind Publications.

Texas Wildscapes provide the essential ingredients for a variety of wildlife – food, water, shelter, and space. This is done by planting and maintaining native vegetation, installing birdbaths and ponds, and creating structure. Feeders can supplement native vegetation, but can never replace it. The goal is to provide places for birds, small mammals, and other wildlife to feed and drink, escape from predators, and raise their young.

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

### Planting

- ◆ It is time to plant sweet potatoes.
- ◆ Plant other hot-weather, summer-blooming plants including succulents, purple fountain grass, Esperanza, hibiscus, plumbago, purslane, moss rose, Mexican petunia, and angel's trumpet.
- ◆ Consider such shade plants as 'Texas Gold' columbine, elephant ears, impatiens, torenias, nicotiana, and caladiums.
- ◆ Wait until June to plant periwinkles (vinca).
- ◆ After spring-flowering bulbs have bloomed, divide and replant them. Make sure the tops have dried before moving. The foliage feeds the bulbs for next year's blooms.

### Pruning and Fertilizing

- ◆ Manually thin peaches, apples, pears, and plums to about five or six inches apart to produce larger fruit.
- ◆ Fertilize tomatoes and most other vegetables every other week for productive and vigorous plants.
- ◆ Mow lawn grass the proper height every five days to keep it dense and healthy. Keep the blade sharp for a good clean cut to prevent browning at the tips.
- ◆ Deadhead roses and other re-blooming plants. Feed fruit trees, perennials, annuals, ground covers, and vines with a lawn fertilizer.
- ◆ Pinch back Mexican bush sage, aster, chrysanthemum, cooper canyon daisy and Mexican mint marigold to encourage compact plants and more blooms in the fall. These may need to be pruned several times during the year.

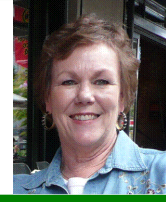
### Garden Watch

- ◆ Look for insects and diseases on tomatoes and other crops. Early detection is imperative. Keep the soil adequately moist to prevent blossom-end rot on tomatoes. Spray for early blight with a labeled insecticide as soon as it's detected. Crop rotation each year will help prevent some diseases from building up in the soil.
- ◆ Hornworms on tomatoes are common and can devastate a crop. They can usually be removed by hand or controlled by Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).
- ◆ Use it with care on any plant. It kills all types of caterpillars including those that are the lava of the butterflies and moths.
- ◆ Squash vine borers and squash bugs tend to be a problem. Destroy squash bug eggs found on the underside of the leaves by hand or a stream of water. Many vegetable pests often can be controlled by mechanical, biological, or organic means before using chemical pesticides. Always read the label to make sure the product is safe for vegetables.



## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



**Dayflower** – Dayflower Family (Commelinaceae)  
*Commelina erecta* L.

**Region:** 1 – 10 (Ellis County is Region 4)  
**Size:** 6 – 18 inches  
**Blooms:** May through October, Perennial

Dayflower is first erect, then trailing, occasionally reaching three feet. There are a number of species in Texas similar enough to be difficult to distinguish. All have three petals, the upper two of which can range from white to, more commonly, a beautiful clear blue. Below these is a third, insignificant, whitish petal which may or may not be noticed. Several buds are clustered in a boat-shaped, sheathing bract, forming a spathe, from which

the flower stalks emerge. Squeezing the spathe gently will produce a tear-like drop of liquid, suggesting another common name, widow's tears. The base of the long, linear leaves wraps the succulent stem in a sheath. Dayflowers close early in the day. Edible stems, leaves, and flowers of tender young plants have a pleasant flavor used raw, stewed or sautéed.

## Book Review: The American Gardener

*With Cerelda De Heus  
Ellis County Master Gardener*

### The American Gardener William Cobbett

The American Gardener, originally published in 1821, is back in print after 150 years and is the first classic work of American gardening literature. William Cobbett was a muckraking journalist born in Surrey, England. He spent two years in a self-imposed exile in Long Island, New York. While there, he wrote The American Gardener, using his gift of writing and his practical knowledge.

I find it surprising that an Englishman, new to our country, could write something that is still relevant today about gardening in America. Considering the differences between the two countries in growing environments, his writings are still practical and useful, if you remember the small detail that we live and garden in Texas, not the northeastern part of the country. He wrote for the Long Island area with the thought others knew where they were and would adjust accordingly.

His best insight goes to the heart of anyone wanting to garden in this part of Texas, "...make the ground rich, move it deep, and make it fine." Include in your garden only those things that are really useful for profit and preservation of health. Small plots have provided sustenance for years; large is not everything, even in Texas.

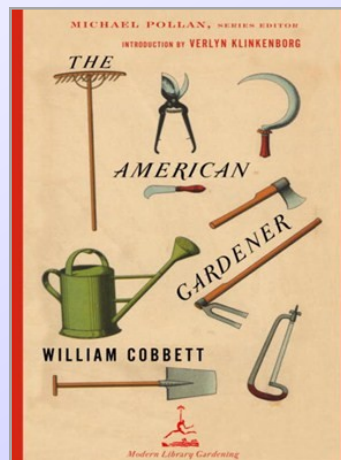
The book is written for those 'creating' a new garden, however the writings are relevant to any gardener, experienced or not, as we learn new things daily. "A level area is best...if not do the best with what you have." If planned and prepared properly, according to Mr. Cobbett, a garden will last for ages. He wanted people

to think of the future in all of their endeavors and labors.

Written in the days before chemicals were available, so truly organic and how our great grandparents gardened. He writes about hotbeds, greenhouses, propagation, cultivation, soil, fencing, and general matters of gardening along with specific information about vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers.

I was reminded of things I saw in gardens as a child when visiting my grandparents and other relatives while reading parts of this book. Growing a garden of any kind adds beauty to our lives and provides us roots where we live. Reading a good book is a relaxing way to pass the time while waiting for the first ripe tomato of the season to appear.

Available from Dallas Arboretum Gift Shop, Amazon, Barnes and Noble





## Herb of the Month: Dill

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Dill, (*Anethum graveolens*) has a long and ancient history in many countries as a culinary and medicinal herb. The earliest known record of dill as a medicinal herb was found in Egypt 5,000 years ago, where the plant was referred to as a "soothing medicine". The name "dill" means to "calm or soothe", and most likely originates from the plant's ability to calm troubled stomachs and colicky infants.

Dill's family members include parsley, cilantro, fennel, and Queen Anne's lace. Dill is an aromatic herb native to the Mediterranean area. While it is sometimes grown as a biennial, it is most commonly grown as an annual. Depending upon the variety,

the plant can grow anywhere from 1 foot to up to 4 feet tall. In Texas dill is grown as a cool weather herb meaning it will flower and



set seed as the temperature rises. During prolonged periods of drought, dill requires some watering. It grows well in temperatures ranging from 40 to 80 degrees. Shorter varieties are preferred in Texas as high winds can cause damage to the hollow stems which break and bend easily. Dill prefers a damp soil but not soggy. Plant dill in full sun. Seeds germinate best when planted in the fall after the first frost. Seeds will begin to germinate as the weather warms in the spring. Like all plants with a long tap root dill pre-

fers to grow where sown and does not transplant well.

Do not let your plants flower if you want a continuous supply of leaves or dill weed.

Dill weed is best used fresh. Keep the tops trimmed regularly to delay flowering.

Dill flowers and leaves are used in pickling. Dill seed is harvested at the end of the plant's life cycle. The seeds can be easily harvested when they have turned a golden

brown color. Place the seed heads in a brown paper bag allowing some of the stems to remain outside of the bag. Tie the opening closed and hang the stems upside down in a well ventilated area to dry. Clean seeds from plant material and store in an airtight container.

Dill is most commonly known for giving dill pickles their flavor. However dill is a very versatile herb in the kitchen. Dill weed can be added to soups, stews, casseroles, meat dishes,

pasta, salads and egg dishes. Cooks use dill seeds as a condiment and combined with onions, cabbage, potatoes, cumin, chili powder and paprika. They can be added to casseroles, lamb, fish, vegetable dishes and sauces. Dill seeds take a long time to release their flavor, so it is best to add them early in the cooking process.

Dill is a wonderful host plant for butterflies, providing food and protection for their eggs and larvae. Be sure to plant enough dill in your garden to meet your needs as well as those of the butterflies. You won't be sorry when you are enjoying the black swallowtails in your garden.

Resource: *The Herb Society of America's Essential Guide to Dill*



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Expo Exhibitor?

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

**Reserve the date: March 29, 2014!**

## Caladiums - A Summer Favorite

With Shirley Campbell  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Mother's Day is a good target date for planting caladiums. Optimum soil temperature should be 65° to 70° F. Caladium tubers tend to rot if planted too early in soil that is too cool.

The life or energy of a caladium tuber is measured in weeks. The average life is usually around 20 weeks. By staggering the time of your plantings, you can have beautiful caladiums going into the fall. Plant as late as June or July to extend the foliage display.

Although their colors will be brighter if given afternoon shade, some caladiums can bask in the sun while others are only happy in the shade. The more sunlight caladiums are grown in, the higher the water requirements.

In trials at the Dallas Arboretum, these caladiums have been given the *Arboretum Approved* designation:

### Fancy Leaf

- Apple Blossom – shade, rose-colored veins, pink blush, green border, great habit
- Firecracker Red – shade, deep red shiny foliage, tall red with green margin
- Moonlight – shade, almost metallic pure white foliage, no burn all summer, thick growing and full
- Raspberry Moon (pictured right) – shade, raspberry flecks, bright lemony green splotches, full plants, very unique color
- Roseglow – shade, dark rosy-glow centers, deep green edging



### Strap leaf

- Candyland – shade but can take full sun, candy colored pink splotches, yummy looking, very full and bushy, fast growing
- Mount Everest (pictured right) – shade, it's bigger and taller than some fancy leaf, super bunching, huge
- Victoria – Can take shade to sun, ruffled compact mounds of bright red-pink
- White marble, White Star, White Delight– Can take shade to sun, white waxy large leaves,
- Thai East Meets West – shade, bright white leaves with red veins, short and compact, grows in a whorl
- Thai My Thai – shade, dark red foliage with white veins and green border, shiny foliage, fast growing



- Starburst – shade, new growth has light pink veins on pale green background, develops white veins on dark pink background as they age

Caladiums do best in a well-drained porous soil mixture that is rich in organic matter. Set the tubers, with the knobby side up, 8 to 12 inches apart depending on the tuber size (the smaller the tuber the closer together). Plant 2 inches deep

with a 1 to 2 inch layer of mulch to maintain the moisture they need. At planting time some growers recommend removing the central bud to encourage more leaf production from the side buds. To do this, press the bud with your thumb; it usually pops off easily. Incorporate a slow release fertilizer into the soil at the time of planting and again at six to eight week intervals ending in September.

As they mature, caladiums will develop ivory-colored flowers that resemble a spike, partly enveloped by a petal-like bract. Remove these flowers as they form so that the plant's energy will be directed to producing more foliage.

Versatile enough to be used in containers as well as in your garden, try combining taller varieties with some of the shorter varieties. A stunning combination would be Aaron as your background, Candidum in the middle, and White Wing in the foreground.

Want something that no one else has? Look for Twist and Shout--- burnt orange background with dark olive-green dots and leaf border!

What would a Texas summer be without caladiums? With their brightly colored leaves, who needs flowers! Just admiring caladiums gives us that cool feeling.





## Landscape Gardening

From: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a website at [www.ecmga.com](http://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.

### **Home-Grown Sweet Potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*)**

Cynthia W. Mueller, Master Gardener,  
Galveston County, TX

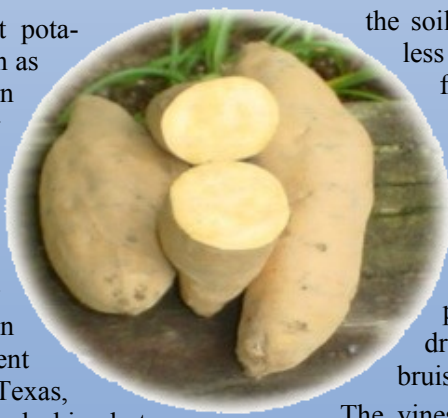
The sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) is one of the classic Southern vegetables that can be grown in the home garden with ease. Even George Washington grew them! They do prefer good sandy soil, but are able to adapt to many different soil types in the garden. There are many varieties to choose from. Slips may be ordered from mail-order supply sources the first year, then fresh slips may be grown from your own sweet potatoes after that.

Some favorite varieties include 'Centennial', an old favorite, and 'Georgia Jets,' planted because of its very fast growth and high yields.

Dr. Larry Ralston, entomologist with the LSU Ag Center, bred up a much more insect-resistant sweet potato in 1987, which was called the 'Beauregard.' This has become the most popular Louisiana sweet potato because of its beautiful eating appearance, with copper colored flesh.

Various white sweet potatoes, with names such as 'Triumph', 'Southern Queen', 'Poplar Root', 'Choker' and 'White Bunch' are usually sweet, but dry.

The Mexican or Central American 'Boniato' is an excellent grower for Central Texas, with a normal colored skin, but white, slightly sweet flesh that cooks up looking much like Irish potatoes. 'Nancy Hall' (pictured) is an old fashioned yellowish fleshed potato that is not much on looks but is still being grown.



'O'Henry' has basically a white skin and cream colored insides.

Water regularly in the absence of rain and fertilize with a balanced fertilizer once a month. As the season progresses, sweet potato vines can appear to be smothering entire garden plots.

If space is at a premium, one solution would be to plant "bush" types, such as 'Porto Rico' or 'Vardaman.' The vines can often be redirected into relatively empty areas of the garden.

In order to keep an eye on the spots where the underground tubers are forming, or in order to water successfully, it is sometimes necessary to plant a few sticks or rods in the ground next to the roots of the plants. In the fall at harvest time, digging near the markers will bring up the largest and most developed potatoes.

When it is time to harvest, do so before the soil temperature drops to less than 50°F to prevent frost blackening. The vines may be frosted partially with the first few cold snaps. At this time, cut these back and dig the sweet potatoes, preferably while soil is dry. Take care not to bruise or cut the tubers.

The vines often root here and there along the way and numerous smaller plantlets with tubers may appear. If these are too small to harvest, they may be left in place in the ground. In a mild winter, they may survive to

repopulate the garden the next spring. Be sure that garden soil is heaped over their tops, because any direct contact of the young tubers with frosty air will cause them to blacken.

Otherwise, harvest smaller tubers and bury them in pots of soil to be put away

in the garage, shed or other freeze-proof areas to produce "slips" for the next year. The containers may be moistened lightly several times through the winter.

After harvesting, sweet potatoes are cured to

allow the skin to heal over, which prevents the entry of disease organisms and ensuing decay. Gardeners can put the sweet potatoes into sheds or garages where there is good air circulation and where the building will be warm enough to facilitate skin healing. Commercial growers plan to keep the sweet potatoes at a temperature of 80 to 90°F, with a relative humidity of 85 to 90 percent. After about two weeks the sweet potatoes will be cured.

Storing them through the winter is most successful in a building where the temperature is well above freezing and the air is dry.

### **Garden Checklist for May 2013**

- ✿ Prune spring-flowering shrubs soon after flowering. Keep the natural shape of the plant in mind as you prune, and avoid excessive cutting except where necessary to control size.
- ✿ Roses have high fertilizer requirements. For most soils, use a complete

Landscape Gardening (Continued from page 6)

fertilizer for the first application just as new growth starts, then use ammonium sulfate, or another high nitrogen source, every four to six weeks, usually just as the new growth cycle starts following a flowering cycle.

- ✧ Continue to spray rose varieties susceptible to black spot, using an appropriate fungicidal spray such as Funginex. Use every seven to ten days, or as recommended.
- ✧ Climbing hybrid tea roses may be pruned as soon as they complete flowering.
- ✧ Removing spent flowers, trimming back excessive growth, and applying fertilizer to an established bed can do wonders towards rejuvenating and extending the life of the plant.

- ✧ As soon as azaleas have finished flowering, apply an acid type fertilizer at the rate recommended. Don't over fertilize, as azalea roots are near the surface and damage can occur. Water thoroughly after fertilizing.

**Aphids on new growth**



- ✧ Seeds of amaranthus, celosia, cosmos, marigold, portulaca, zinnia, and other warm-season annuals can be sown directly in the beds where they are to grow. Keep seeded areas moist until seeds germinate. Thin out as soon as they are large enough to transplant. Surplus plants can be transplanted to other areas.

- ✧ It will soon be time for bagworms to attack junipers and other narrow leafed evergreens. Light infestations may be controlled by hand picking and burning. Control measures such as Sevin dust or spray, should be applied while the insects and the bags are about one-half inch in length.

**Bagworm Cocoon**



- ✧ For instant color, purchase started annual plants. Select short, compact plants. Any flowers or flower buds should be pinched to give plants an opportunity to become established.

- ✧ Check new tender growth for aphids. A few can be tolerated, but large numbers

should be controlled. Always follow label instructions on approved pesticides for control.

- ✧ Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clips and storing in a sealed glass jar in your refrigerator.

- ✧ Start weeding early in the flower garden. Early competition with

small plants can delay flowering. A mulch will discourage weed growth and make those that do come through easier to pull.

- ✧ Soil purchased for use in beds, low areas, and containers should be examined closely. Often, nut grass and other weeds, nematodes, and soil-borne disease are brought into the yard through contaminated soil sources.
- ✧ Watch newspaper and other publicity for information regarding wildflower trails, and plan to take a trip to enjoy this beautiful natural resource.





## Texas Native Tree: Mountain Laurel

By Marilyn Simmons  
Ellis County Master Gardener Intern



### Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*)

The Texas Mountain Laurel is a wonderful evergreen specimen tree often used in the landscape. This naturally slow-growing beauty typically grows six to twelve feet. However, given the right conditions, can grow to 30 feet tall. Space this tree a minimum of ten feet apart.

Mountain Laurels can grow in the sun, dappled shade, part shade, or as an understory tree. It will benefit in Ellis County with some protection from the north wind. This tree grows from the Rio Grande Plains north to Austin and West to Trans-Pecos and is found in New Mexico and Mexico.

The Mountain Laurel grows well in sand, loam, clay, caliche, limestone; well-drained and some salinity is okay. If left unpruned and in full sun, this specimen could be considered as a large shrub.

This evergreen tree has glossy green leaves. In early spring, it loads up

with clusters of purple flowers that perfume the area with a “grape soda like” fragrance. After blooms fade, the tree loads up with a brown velvet pod. When they ripen, the seeds inside the pod are brilliant red. Beware the red, glossy seeds are highly toxic.

The Texas Mountain Laurel can be purchased from local nurseries in five and seven gallon containers. Occasionally, larger balled and burlapped trees are available. When planting a five gallon container Texas Mountain Laurel, expect a very slow growth in the first few years. Plan to stake it when it finally starts growing since the top growth

exceeds the trunk for a short time.

This specimen will offer spring color and winter interest and a habitat for birds. Because of that, the Texas Mountain Laurel is a great consideration for your landscape.



*What's Happening in May (Continued from page 1)*

**Cash Only, Rain or Shine.** Registrants will receive an event T-Shirt (while supplies last). For additional information contact Robert Rinker at (817) 881-2736 or email [info\\_CRP@yahoo.com](mailto:info_CRP@yahoo.com)

**Saturday, May 18, 9am—12pm, Conservation in Action Workday.** Volunteers remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. Snacks, water, pruning shears, shovels, and work gloves are provided. All you need to bring is sunscreen and bug repellent. For info, email [info\\_CRP@yahoo.com](mailto:info_CRP@yahoo.com)

**Texas Discovery Gardens**  
3601 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Dallas  
[TexasDiscoveryGardens.org](http://TexasDiscoveryGardens.org)

**Saturday, May 18, 10am—1pm, Edible Wild Plants.** Many of our local plants—especially common weeds—are extremely nutritious! Director of Horticulture Roger Sanderson will teach which are tasty and which are not! Sample some of the native fare at the end of the workshop. \$20; \$15 for TDG Members.

**Saturday, June 1, 9am—12pm, Gardening for Small Spaces.** See how easy it is to grow a vegetable garden or add some seasonal color to your balcony or patio. Learn sustainable gardening in a small space. Bring home a finished container! \$60; \$48 for TDG Members. Register in advance.



## Raised Bed Gardening

By J. R. McMahan  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Northern states may have more cold and ice, but you can till a garden right into the rich, brown earth in most of them. Not so in our area of North Texas where the ground is made of clay. Raised bed gardens are a good way to create planting beds in our primarily clay soils and are a good alternative for planting directly in the ground.

A raised bed garden is an area built up on all four sides allowing the soil to be above regular ground level, but contained by sides.

Raised beds can be any length, but a width of three to four feet allows the gardener to be able to reach into the center of the bed from both sides and not have to step into the bed, which compacts the soil. A wider bed will need a path of stepping stones or similar material.

Sides can be made of any sturdy material that will hold up to outdoor weather conditions. Landscape timbers can be stacked several high and secured with rebar rods by holes drilled



through the timbers. Landscape blocks can be stacked to form decorative curves, and if stacked two to three feet high, can create a raised bed that requires little bending over. Garden ready bed kits are also available and include bed sides and connector pieces that fit together forming squares or rectangles. These are usually made out of recycled plastics.

Raised beds allow the soil in each bed to be prepared specifically to the plants being grown there. The height of the bed sides is not as important as the soil preparation. A bed with sides less than eight to ten inches high should have the ground soil tilled and amended as much as possible before adding the raised bed soil so plants in the raised bed can grow their roots down far enough.

Another advantage to having raised beds is the sun

warms the soil more quickly in the springtime and some seeds and transplants can be started sooner in the

warmer soil. One of the best advantages of having a raised bed garden is better water drainage. A raised bed allows water to drain down and away from the plant roots. When plant roots sit in water too long, the roots are deprived of much needed oxygen and continu-

ously wet conditions can weaken the plant making it more susceptible to disease and pests.

A healthy plant is a happy plant! Happy plants love raised beds where they can grow and thrive in nutrient rich soil, warmer soil, and most importantly, good draining soil.



**Save The Date!**  
**Saturday, March 29, 2014**



**“We can complain  
because rose bushes  
have thorns, or rejoice  
that thorn bushes  
have roses.”**

**~Abraham Lincoln**





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