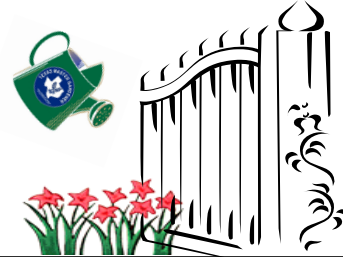




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume IX, Issue Eleven

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

November, 2016

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

What's Happening in November?

Ellis County Master Gardener Monthly Meeting You are invited!



David Cohen from Green Phoenix Farms will be speaking at the Master Gardener meeting on **Tuesday, November 8th**. Aquaponics is the culture of fish and plants in a single, natural system. It's a growing trend in urban gardening. If you have ever thought about aquaponics or are curious about the process, plan to attend this program.

Social time begins at 9:30am and the program begins at 10am. Please be our guest! The meeting takes place in the Family Life Center of the First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie. For info, call (972) 825-5175.

Earth-Kind Living Expo



Offered at two locations: Sulphur Springs, TX—November 18 & Palestine, TX—December 2.

Learn about new environmentally-friendly techniques around the home and ranch during this Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Earth-Kind Living conference. The conference will introduce consumers, producers, and volunteers to Earth-Kind Living, a balanced system using university research-proven techniques for quality living, environmental stewardship, and overall well-being.

Experts will share information on agricultural production, land stewardship, health and wellness, and Earth-Kind friendly homes. Cost is \$25 if attendees preregister by November 10 and \$35 the day of the event. For more information and to register, go to <http://agrillife.org/earthkindliving>.

Indian Trail Master Naturalists Events



Join the **Indian Trail Master Naturalists** at their monthly meeting on **Monday, November 28**. Sam Kieschnick, **Urban Wildlife Biologist, DFW for Texas Parks and Wildlife** will present the program entitled "**Teaming with Texas Wildlife**". Teaming with Wildlife is a national coalition of businesses and organizations committed to restoring and conserving our native wildlife. The goal of Teaming with

Wildlife is to find sustainable funding to support wildlife conservation and management efforts. Sam previously worked as a nature educator at Mansfield's Oliver Nature Park, as a naturalist at the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge, as a science interpreter with the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, as a botanist with BRIT, and as an instructor at Weatherford College.

The program is free and follows the 6 p.m. Master Naturalist meeting that is also open to the public. Meeting location: First United Methodist Church, Family Life Center 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie. For more info, call (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu

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Listen to KBEC

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

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

Melinda Kocian

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Gayfeather (*Liatris elegans*) The gayfeather is a slender, unbranched plant, one to four feet tall. Its narrow leaves, much like pine needles, are about three inches long, whorled around the stem. The flower spike is six to twenty inches tall, blooming from the top downward.

Flowers are purple, about a half inch long. There are no ray flowers, but long petal-like bracts the same color as the disc flowers. Blooms August to October.

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

Planting

- ✂ This is an ideal time to plant cool-season greens, such as spinach, lettuce, mustard, Swiss chard, and arugula.
- ✂ Bluebonnets can still be planted from transplants. Plant pansies and violas this month, and mix in blood meal with the amended soil.
- ✂ Daffodils and grape hyacinth may be planted once soil temperature drops below 55° F. Plant two to three times as deep as the bulb is tall.
- ✂ Now through February is a great time to plant container-grown trees and shrubs. Consider the mature size of the plant, especially trees, when deciding on variety and placement. Dig a hole two times the diameter and one inch shallower than the root ball. Make sure the root ball and the hole are thoroughly wet before planting. Backfill with existing soil only and water well.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- ✂ Feed and water cool-season vegetables that you are growing now.
- ✂ Feed winter annuals growing in the ground and containers with a high-nitrogen, water-soluble plant food every two to three weeks.
- ✂ Remove tops of herbaceous perennials after they have died. Add two to three inches of mulch to beds to reduce winter weed growth.
- ✂ Trim patio plants and hanging baskets before moving indoors for the winter. Locate them near bright windows.
- ✂ Refrain from pruning freeze-damaged plant material at this time. This pruning is best done in late winter.

Garden Watch

- ✂ It's time to winterize. Disconnect hoses from faucets and drain all hose-end sprinklers. Bring all tender tropicals indoors. Greenhouse owners should check heating and ventilation systems to ensure proper operation. Perform maintenance on outdoor equipment. Drain fuel from gasoline-powered engines and run the carburetor dry.

- ✂ Check potted plants growing outside for insects (mealy bugs, whiteflies, spider mites, aphids, roaches, ants) before moving inside for the winter. Apply a labeled insecticide several days prior to the move, if needed.
- ✂ Stockpile leaves for use in compost or as mulch. It is an excellent way to recycle organic waste and to nourish plants and enrich the soil. Mix one cup of high nitrogen fertilizer per cubic yard of compost. Turn pile with spade fork to keep it aerated. Water, if needed.
- ✂ When planning new landscapes, select trees, shrubs, and perennials that are winter hardy in your area. It is best to choose plants from your zone and the one or two zones to the north of you. According to the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone map, Ellis County is located in Zone 8 (average lowest annual temperature is 10° F to 20° F). Therefore, plants listed for Zones 8, 7 and 6 should be your best bets.

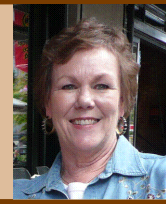
False Foxglove (*Penstemon cobaea*) Attractive perennial features single or multi-stem, one to two feet tall with beautiful flowers in the upper part of the stem. Leaves are glossy, deep green covered in fine hair. Flowers are showy, bell shaped, two-lipped clustered at intervals.

Flower color ranges from white to lavender, streaked with purple strips inside the flower. Attracts several species of moths. Blooms April to June.



Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Texas Aster – *A. texannus*

Aster spp.

Sunflower family (*Asteraceae*)



Identifying wild asters by species may be baffling to the amateur naturalist and it often challenges the professional. One authority states that Texas has forty-five species. There are at least six wild blue asters, ranging from blue-white, blue, violet and lavender to purple. The many-petaled flowers range in size from a half-inch to two inches. Center disks are yellow. Flowers on the upper stems are profuse. Most asters are fall blooming and an important source of late-season nectar for butterflies. A tea made from cured roots of the plant was used by Indians to stop diarrhea. Asters can be seen along edges of woods, or prairies and along fence rows where they grow in clay, sand or gravelly soils.

POP-UP HORTICULTURAL CLASSES AT THE WAXAHACHIE FARMERS MARKET



“Raised Bed” gardening was the subject of the October 15th “Pop-Up Horticulture” event at the Waxahachie Downtown Farmers Market. Ellis County Master Gardener Susan Clark shared her expertise and personal experiences with market visitors on building and using raised beds for growing vegetables, herbs, and flowers.

Raised beds are free-standing garden beds constructed above the natural terrain, and an excellent alternative for gardeners who have heavy clay or shallow, rocky soils. These beds also work great for homeowners with limited outdoor space. If you would like more information about building and gardening with raised beds, contact the Master Gardeners at (972) 825-5175 or email ellis-tx@tamu.edu.



Flavors of Thanksgiving

By Arlene Hamilton
Ellis County Master Gardener



Thanksgiving has always been a major holiday in the Hamilton family. When my husband was a child, his family gathered at various Oklahoma homes with parents and grandparents. Now we are

the oldest generation and will be traveling to Stillwater for this year's feast with three generations forward to our grandkids and their cousins. This year there are eleven families involved, so numbers are difficult to nail down.

With two professional chefs in the family, a school nutritionist, and some excellent cooks, the harvest table will have plenty of variety and something for all. Chefs Gregg and Bill have stepped up and offered to prepare the bird. I've seen some e-mails being passed around about a fried Cajun turkey with assorted rou-lades. Sounds interesting.

With the bird in good hands, I will make my favorite side, the dressing. Since moving to Texas, I'm delighted to have switched from dried herbs to fresh for the seasoning. Although sage is the primary flavoring, a combination of others including thyme, marjoram, parsley, and a bit of rosemary makes a well blended flavor. Throw away those cans of dried blends and start growing your herbs. Even a large pot at the back door will hold an assortment of fresh herbs ready to be snipped and used.



chives and dill to sour cream or plain yogurt to make a tasty dip with fresh vegetable sticks. Add some chopped fresh herbs to butter then use to flavor cooked vegetables.

For a Provence herb blend, try basil, fennel, marjoram, savory, thyme, and Mexican mint marigold (in place of tarragon). Again, all of the herbs are still fresh and green in the Texas garden.

Even dessert gets a lift with fresh herbs. If you are making a custard pumpkin pie, try adding a fresh bay leaf to the milk, heat and allow to steep for about 15 minutes then remove the leaf and use the flavored milk.

Herbs are so versatile, so be creative this Thanksgiving and see where it takes you. And no matter where you celebrate Thanksgiving this year, I hope it will be with people you love.





TICKETS AVAILABLE...Get yours today!

Farm to Table on the Square, Downtown Waxahachie

The Waxahachie Farmers Market, Downtown Merchants Association, and the Culinary Arts Program at Waxahachie High School are teaming up to serve dinner at an exclusive event on the square in downtown Waxahachie on **Saturday, November 5, starting at 5 p.m.**

Organizers are planning a harvest-themed dinner which will invite diners to experience a five-course meal while sitting communally at one long table stretching the block of Franklin Street between Rogers and College Streets on the Square. The ingredients are being sourced from the WHS Horticulture program, Ellis County Master Gardeners, local beef producers, Waxahachie Farmers Market members and other select growing sources.

WHS Culinary Instructor Joel Skipper says, "It's November so it's pretty much a fall menu, and there's thousands of options. I couldn't be more excited getting to use produce locally sourced. I'm more excited about my kids getting to be involved...getting to learn what I do and, hopefully, they love it as much as I love it."

The high school art students under the direction of instructor Sean Cagle, will make hand-thrown pottery, a gift each guest will receive as part of their ticket price. The horticulture students assisted by the Ellis County Master Gardeners are growing the greens for the salad course.

Tickets are \$100 per person and information can be found at www.downtownwaxahachie.com. If the Eventbrite ticket sales are closed, contact Arlene Hamilton at a.p.hamilton@att.net for ticket information.. All proceeds benefit the WHS Culinary Arts Program.



Lettuce growing in the greenhouse!

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

Join Ellis County Master Gardeners and Ellis County Extension Agency in a variety of classes to prepare your gardens and your yards for fall.

Monday, November 7, 6pm–7:30pm, Chickens 101. Backyard chickens have become very popular. If you are thinking of starting a flock or adding to an existing one, this is the class for you. The class will cover planning the addition of chickens, basic set up needed for baby chicks, where to get baby chicks, and how to care for them. City ordinances, health issues and how to keep your flock healthy will also be covered along with appropriate food and treats. Instructor: Jane Sloan ♦ Cost: \$12.00

Thursday, December 1, 6pm–7:30pm, Creating a Butterfly Garden. Creating a butterfly garden can be fun and easy for everyone, from the novice to the experienced gardener. This class will guide participants through all the phases of planning for and creating garden environments that attract and support butterfly populations. This includes garden layout, host plant selection, plants that provide nectar, and other butterfly friendly environment tips. Instructor: Bea Rocha ♦ Cost: \$12.00

Monday, December 5, 6pm–7:30pm, Herbal Vinegars, Butters and Spreads. A common challenge for herb gardeners can be how to utilize all those wonderful herbs in the kitchen. Dried or fresh, herbs lend a wonderful flavor, aroma, and even healthful factor to foods we enjoy on a regular basis. In this class, we'll do a quick review of how to grow and harvest herbs, then discuss how to use herbs to create tasty herbal vinegars, butters, and spreads. This is a hands-on class where you will come away with recipes and your own herbal vinegar to take home. Instructor: Susan Clark ♦ Cost: \$12.00 + \$5.00 supply fee pay to instructor.

Tuesdays, October 11–November 1 (four classes), 6pm–8pm, Beginning Farmer/Rancher. If you are a landowner or have recently acquired a farm or ranchland and are seeking information for the best way to utilize your property, join this experienced instructor for advice. Topics covered include: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management. This class will be taught at the Ellis County Texas A&M Agri Life Extension Office at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3 in Waxahachie. Instructor: Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources ♦ Cost: \$22.00



FALLING LEAVES - Nature's Fertilizer

By: Shirley Campbell, Ellis County Master Gardener



Autumn leaves drift by my window...the falling leaves of red and gold. (Just had to stop and play Nat King Cole's CD, which put me in a good mood.) Gosh! I think fall is my favorite season. I love the smells of fall, the anticipation of cooler weather, and all the family gathering here for the Thanksgiving holiday. Living along the edge of the woods, there is always a huge brush pile to be burned which entertains the guys and some of the gals for a couple days. Who doesn't like sitting around the fire on a cool, crisp night!

Now back to those falling leaves.

If you're not wanting to have a compost pile in your backyard, then what can you do with all those falling leaves that will end up being dumped in the landfills if you put them out on the curb?

Fallen tree leaves represent a valuable natural resource, providing organic matter and nutrients for your landscape. Fallen leaves contain 50 to 80 percent of the nutrients a plant extracts from the soil and air during the growing season. Your landscape can benefit from these nutrients. In essence, you are throwing away fertilizer when you burn or toss fallen leaves. It is when leaves fall to the ground and start decomposing that all the stored nutrition gets released back into your landscape.

Actually, the most environmentally sensible thing to do is leave them where they fall. Dead leaves from your native trees and shrubs make excellent mulch. And they're free! Fallen leaves protect fragile roots (which are usually near the surface) from the cold. Don't ever rake your yard until it's leaf-free because then you have bare ground that's exposed to the elements and any weed seed that flies by.

Leaves left on the ground to decompose attract insect-eating songbirds like thrashers, warblers, and wrens. The soil is more nutritious, so you'll probably see robins earlier in the spring as well as other birds seeking nest-building material.

Below are five options for managing leaves and using them in your landscape and garden.

Mowing. A light covering of leaves on the lawn can be mowed and simply left in place. This option is most effective when a mulching mower is used. During times of light leaf drop or if there are only a few small trees in your landscape, this option is probably the most efficient and easiest way to manage fallen leaves. The only drawback to this practice is large leaves or too many leaves can form a mat and smother plants, cutting them off completely from sunlight, air, or water. This may require running your lawnmower over the fallen leaves several times.

Mulching. Mulching is a simple and effective way to recycle leaves and improve your landscape. Mulch carpets the soil and reduces moisture evaporation, inhibits weed growth, moderates soil temperatures, keeps soil from eroding, and prevents soil compaction. As in the forest, leaves serving as a mulch decompose slowly and release their nutrients for use by your landscape plants. Fallen leaves can be used as mulch in vegetable gardens, in flower and shrub beds, underneath hedge rows, in natural areas, and around trees. Using a lawn mower with a bagging attachment provides a fast way to shred and collect the leaves. Fallen leaves that have been mowed or shredded decompose faster and are much

more likely to remain in place than unshredded leaves.

Using in the vegetable garden. In addition to mulching the garden rows, place a thick layer of leaves in the furrows between rows to function as a mulch, an all-weather walkway, and a compost-in-place location. For the next gardening season, move the row over into the furrow. The decomposed leaves from last year can be tilled into the soil to create the new rows. Repeating this process year after year will produce a fabulous, highly organic garden soil.

Tilling into the soil. Fallen leaves can be collected and tilled directly into the soil for shrub plantings, flower beds, and vegetable gardens. This is best done in the fall allowing sufficient time for the leaves to decompose prior to spring planting. Adding small amounts of nitrogen fertilizer or manure to the soil will speed up decomposition. A six to eight inch layer of leaves turned into a heavy clay soil will improve aeration and drainage. The same amount added to a light, sandy soil will improve water- and nutrient-holding capacity.



Photo credit: [jacki-dee](#) via [Foter.com](#) / CC BY-NC-ND

Bag Composting. Bag composting is one of the easiest composting methods. However, the quality of the compost produced may not be as high as that made by more traditional methods. To produce compost in a bag, simply collect the leaves and place them in heavy-duty, plastic trash bags. Shredded leaves work best. Into each bag full of leaves, put one to two shovelfuls of garden soil and either two shovelfuls of manure or about one-half cup of a high nitrogen fertilizer. Apply enough water to thoroughly moisten the leaves. Punch 10 to 15 holes in the plastic

bag to allow for air circulation. Turn the bag once or twice and add water, if needed, to keep the leaves moist. Store in an out-of-sight place. After about two weeks open the bags to check on the composting process. Under most circumstances, the compost will be ready for use in about six to eight weeks.

The following excerpt is from the publication "Don't Bag It-Leaf Management Plan", from Texas A&M and is available at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/landscape/leaf-management-plan/>.

During the year, at least 20 percent of the solid waste generated by Texans comes from grass clippings, tree leaves, and other landscape wastes. Bagging these materials and placing them into the curbside garbage collection system uses valuable landfill space, removes nutrients from the environment, and costs cities and the people of Texas more in increased taxes and service fees.

Of the landscape waste, approximately half is composed of tree leaves.

What you see on the ground is a very bountiful, nutritious gift to you and your landscape—a gift that shouldn't be thrown away, pushed aside, or sent to the landfill.

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

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

- ✎ Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.
- ✎ Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- ✎ Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well-lighted window.
- ✎ Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- ✎ Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- ✎ November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. In the Panhandle, planting is often delayed until February or early March.
- ✎ Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus. Sweet peas may also be planted now in the southern half of the state.
- ✎ Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- ✎ Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- ✎ Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.
- ✎ Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.
- ✎ Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't overwater. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and doorway openings. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- ✎ Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.
- ✎ Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted after they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- ✎ Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with four or five joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within three to four weeks.
- ✎ Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half, to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.
- ✎ Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.
- ✎ Berry plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.



Interested in becoming a
2017 Expo Sponsor Or
Expo Exhibitor?

Contact James Kocian at
expo.ecmga@yahoo.com

Reserve the date: **March 25, 2017!**



Become a Texas Master Gardener

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

What is a Master Gardener?

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

Is the Master Gardener program for me?

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

- ☞ Do I want to learn more about the culture and maintenance of many types of plants?
- ☞ Am I eager to participant in a practical and intense training program?
- ☞ Do I enjoy sharing my knowledge with people?
- ☞ Do I have enough time to attend training and complete volunteer service hour requirements?
- ☞ Do I have special interests that could benefit the community or an interest in developing one? (e.g., bird or butterfly knowledge, native gardens, wildflowers, etc.)
- ☞ Do I have a sincere interest in nature or gardening?

Training

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

The Master Gardener training course will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each Tuesday and Thursday throughout the month of February, 2017, at the First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Street, Waxahachie, Texas.

Volunteer Commitment

In exchange for the training, participants are required to volunteer at least 75 hours of service by November 30th to earn the title of "Texas Master Gardener". Volunteer opportunities will be offered at various times during the week and during the Annual Lawn & Garden Expo, which is held on a Saturday in the spring.

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

Certification

Participants become certified Master Gardeners after completion of the training course and fulfillment of volunteer commitment.

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

If you are interested in the Master Gardener Program and would like an application, please contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Ellis County at (972) 825-5175, e-mail Ellis-tx@tamu.edu or find the application on the Master Gardener website, ECMGA.com. Applications will be mailed upon request and must be returned no later than December 19, 2016, at which time you will be called to set up an interview.

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



Eclectic Gardening

With Jane Slone, Ellis County Master Gardener

THIS MONTH:

Fall Division of Perennials



Perennials are plants that come back from one season to the next.

In my garden, iris, daylilies, and mums have grown for over twenty years. It is such a delight each spring to see that first flower that breaks through the soil and provides me with one

of the joys of life.

Some perennials bloom in spring through summer, and some reach their height of production in the fall. Fall is an excellent time of year to move and divide many spring and summer blooming perennials. However fall is not a good time to move fall blooming perennials. A good rule of thumb is to divide perennials opposite their season of bloom. By dividing the plant when it is not flowering, all the energy it produces can be directed to root and foliage growth.

By dividing now, we give the roots a chance to become established before winter. This will produce a higher yield of flowers. The division of perennials allows for new plants to grow in the spring.

How do you know when it's time to divide plants?

The rule of thumb states that most perennials need to be thinned at least every two years to five years, and several varieties never need to be thinned. By observing your plants and how they produced this year can help you decide if you want to divide them. If you find that your plants look rather sparse in the middle, they are being crowded and production of flowers will be reduced due to the lack of nutrients and root space. Each plant is different.

Iris and daylilies are the most common plants in our area that need to be divided. Iris division should occur when crowded and some experts state every five years. I have found that some of my plants need it sooner. For me, iris will produce healthier and larger blooms if they are divided at least every two years. Removing the older rhizome portion makes a difference in the flower production.

What is a Rhizome?

A rhizome is part of the plant that grows underground. It is a Greek term that means the mass of roots. They are modified stems. They will grow laterally underground and spread roots out from the center. The rhizome itself can be cut and planted

to produce more plants. The rhizomes will branch out and produce roots and stems and become a plant until it becomes so crowded flowers will not have sufficient nutrients for flowering. So, it is the rhizome that limits the flower production. By digging, you can multiply the number of plants. Dig the entire plant structure.

Fall is one of the two times to divide perennials. Some gardeners prefer to divide them after they have bloomed in the spring.

If you dig up the plant by getting under the rhizomes, the large clumps can be divided into many new plants, either to share or to give away. Once the clump has been excavated you need to clean the dirt from the rhizomes and expose the long tendril-structure, which are the roots.

Using a clean and sharp knife, cut the rhizome into sections. Each section should have a healthy rhizome. If it feels mushy or is extremely large, discard and save only the healthy portion. If you are not sure, it is best to discard the entire rhizome. Each

portion of the rhizome should have fans and roots extending from it. The older or damaged leaves can be removed from the plant.

At this point, you can store or plant the iris. To store the iris bulbs until next spring, lay the bulbs on a cloth such as

cheesecloth and allow to dry in a cool environment. When they have dried, you can remove the remaining soil and debris with a soft rag. Throw away any diseased or soft rhizomes. You can dust them with sulfur and this will help prevent any type of rot.

If you are going to plant them, make a mound of dirt. Lay the rhizome over and spread the roots. Cover with soil and water. Each plant should have a minimum of six inches of space from its neighbor. The thought of a triangle design has become popular when planting iris.



(Continued on page 10)

Eclectic Gardening (Continued from page 9)

Fertilizing your plants is important and should occur after blooming. Always check your soil before adding any type of fertilizer. A well-balanced fertilizer with an N-P-K ratio of 10-10-10 should allow for good flower production. The numbers that are represented in the fertilizer ratio stand for N-Nitrogen, P- Phosphorus, and P-Potassium (potash). Do not use a high nitrogen fertilizer as it will produce stems and leaves, but will limit flower production.

Iris are hardy and come in a variety of sizes and colors with double and single flowers. So, find a friend who has more than they need, or visit your garden store and pick out some of the new varieties. In one to two years, you will have beautiful blooms. It will not be long before you can share your plant with others.

Now I will sit back and wait to see which one of my plants provides me with the first breath of spring. Happy Fall Planting!



Save The Date!
Saturday, March 25, 2017



Find us on:
facebook®

Ellis County Master Gardeners are on Facebook and we'd love to have you join us. Check in to find out where and when our local events will be held—events like the Farm to Table event happening this weekend or Lighthouse for Learning Classes going on now. Drop by our page after an event to see pictures.

Use our page as your point of contact to ask us gardening questions or get information about flowers, vegetables and herbs...we cover it all! Some of the recent articles posted include options for fall plants that bring colorful spring blooms, herbs for the fall garden, and updates on local events that gardeners will find interesting and educational. You can also post pictures and let us know what is happening in your gardens and landscape.

You'll find us at this link, and all you have to do is click the "Like" button to see our daily posts! We look forward to hearing from you with questions and comments. If you have a QR Code reader on your smartphone, you can scan our code and be taken directly to our Facebook page.



<https://www.facebook.com/ECMGA>

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