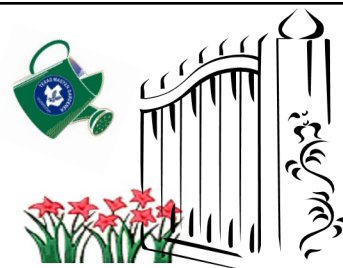




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume VII, Issue Eleven

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

November, 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 November



**Every Saturday—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!**

## At the Waxahachie Farmers Market, Saturday, November 2, Taste of Autumn, Fruit & Vegetable Festival from 10am-12pm.

The market sellers, Ellis County Master Gardeners, and the Ellis County Extension Service will be preparing samples using pumpkins, winter vegetables, and greens. Samplings planned include pumpkin soup, root vegetables, salsas, pumpkin butter, and winter greens tossed in herbed oil. Visit the Master Gardener's booth for some fun kid's crafts, recipes, tips on healthy eating, and information on preserving your harvest.

The Food Truck and the Pizza Oven will be there. In addition to produce, shoppers can find pastries, longhorn beef, gourmet food blends, jellies, jams, relishes, local honey, handmade crafts, hand-crafted soaps, pottery, and more.

Come out and enjoy some great food, a wonderful selection of fresh produce, cool fall weather, and visiting with friends and neighbors.

**Starting in November: Dogwood Canyon offers Free Admission!** In honor of their second anniversary, fly into Dogwood Canyon for free! Visitors can continue to support the center through their new donation box. For info, call (469) 526-1980 or visit <http://dogwoodcanyon.audubon.org/> Center Hours: Open Tuesday-Sunday, 9am-5pm.

**Saturday, November 2, 10am-2pm, BRIT First Saturday-Stewardship Day.** Enjoy tours, children's activities, vendors and booths, farmers market, and special programs. November workshops include: seed collecting, growing grapes, vines and their maintenance, and more! Bella's Story Time for children is at 10:30 and features the book, **Up, Down, and Around** by Katherine Ayer. For more info, visit <http://www.brit.org/events/more-children-families> or call (817) 332-4441.

**Saturday, November 2, 9am, Walk & Talk Bird Tour at John Bunker Sands Wetland Center.** Tour is free with \$5 admission fee, Members free. Binoculars and field guides are available for use. Visit <http://www.wetlandcenter.com/newhome.html> for info.

**Saturday, November 16, 10am, John Bunker Sand's Pond Trail Walk.** This trail is great for families and those interested in native trees, flowers, and animals. Tour is free with \$5 admission fee. Visit <http://www.wetlandcenter.com/newhome.html> for info.

**Saturday, November 16, 10am-12pm, Texas Discovery Gardens Landscaping for Wildlife Class.** Gardening is for the birds—and lizards, squirrels, and more! Your garden can become a buffet for wildlife. Learn how with Dir. of Horticulture, Roger Sanderson. Fee: \$15, \$10 for TDG Members. Info at (214) 428-7476 or [TexasDiscoveryGardens.org](http://TexasDiscoveryGardens.org)

(Continued on page 5)

TEXAS A&M  
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EXTENSION



## Listen to KBEC.....

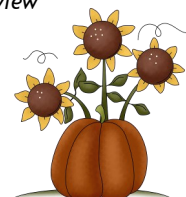
Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. on 1390 AM.

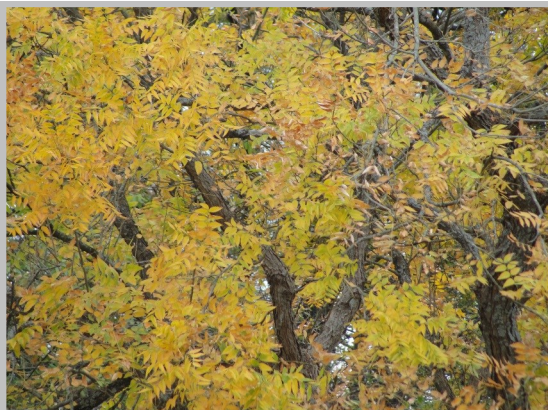
The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a five minute segment every week, offering you helpful information on what you need to be doing in your landscape, as well as "happenings" around the county. Be sure to listen in!

Melinda Kocian

## Inside this issue:

<i>It's Nov, What Needs to be Done?</i>	2
<i>Wildflower of the Month</i>	3
<i>ECMGA Photography Contest</i>	3
<i>Lighthouse for Learning</i>	3
<i>Herb of the Month</i>	4
<i>Getting the Yard Ready for Cold</i>	5
<i>Landscape Gardening</i>	6
<i>Fall Garden Clean Up</i>	8
<i>Book Review</i>	9





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

### Planting

- ⇒ This is the ideal time to plant trees and shrubs. They will use less water to establish before spring and summer weather arrives. Consider the size of the plant, especially tree, at maturity. Allow plenty of distance from property lines and structures.
- ⇒ Dig a hole two to four 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 the existing soil only and water well.

### Fertilizing and Pruning

- ⇒ Feed and water vegetables that you are growing now.
- ⇒ Feed winter annuals growing in the ground and containers with a water-soluble plant food.
- ⇒ Remove the tops of herbaceous perennials after they have died back.

### Garden Watch

- ⇒ Caterpillars like to feast on some cool-season annuals. If they are a problem, pick them off by hand and move them to another location. A spray containing Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) can be used, but it kills all caterpillars.
- ⇒ Check potted plants growing outside for insects; spray if needed before bringing them indoors.
- ⇒ Look out for scale on cast-iron and other plants. Use a horticultural oil to control.

### Earth-Kind® Composting Leaves

Fall is a special time of year in Texas. Cooler temperatures seem to reinvigorate landscape gardeners and stimulate a variety of new projects.

Leaves present less of a challenge in both collection and composting than do other organic yard wastes. In most cases, compost is built from a variety of landscape trimmings and rakings.

Starting with leaves and grass clippings and adding some brush or wood chips for aeration is an excellent mix to begin the composting process.

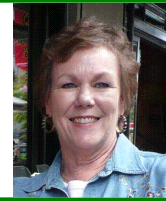
To learn more about Earth-Kind® Composting Leaves, click on the Resource tab at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) and click on Earth-Kind® Publications.



Coarse materials, such as straw, nut shells, corncobs and stalks, take longer to breakdown. Do not discount the use of coarse particles in the compost pile. These materials typically breakdown more slowly and provide increased aeration for the pile. Coarse materials are very important in establishing the optimum particle size distribution for the composting process.

## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



**Puccoon** – Borage Family (Boraginaceae)  
*Lithospermum incisum* Lehm.

**Region:** 1 – 10 (Ellis County is Region 4)

**Size:** 1 foot

**Blooms:** November through June, Perennial

This little plant is distinctive because of the ruffled edges on the lobes of its bright yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers. The trumpets are sometimes more than an inch long and up to three-fourths of an inch across, in terminal clusters. These flowers produce no seed. Later in the spring or summer, three or four large, white, stone-like seeds are produced by small, self-pollinating flowers hidden in the bracts. A rosette of linear leaves that give rise to the stem usually withers by bloom time, but smaller leaves farther up the stem may be three inches long and are fuzzy, as is the stem. Puccoon root yields a red dye. A tea brewed from this plant was used as birth control in the past and several hormone-like molecules have been identified from its juices. Puccoon is one of many native herbs being studied for potential medicinal value.

### 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](http://www.wisd.org/default.aspx?name=CO_LighthouseforLearning)



**Monday, November 4, 6:00–7:30 pm Drip Irrigation–The Basics** Drip irrigation is the most efficient way to water gardens and trees and it is the system that makes the most sense in terms of conserving and limiting water use. In this hands-on class you will learn the types of equipment used in drip systems, how to design a drip system, and how to install and maintain the system. Instructor: Jim Goss. Cost: \$12.00



## ECMGA Amateur Photo Contest

The Ellis County Master Gardener Association's annual photo contest is underway beginning September 1, 2013. **The last date for submissions is March 1, 2014.**

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

For a complete list of contest details, go to [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) and click on the **Photo Contest** link on the front page. There is **no cost to enter** the contest, and photographers can enter up to five photographs per category. Prizes will be awarded to first, second, and third place in each of two categories: Single Specimen and In the Garden. Each winner will receive a gift certificate from one of the following businesses: Roland's Nursery or The Greenery in Waxahatchie or EarthTones Greenery in Midlothian.

## Herb of the Month

By Arlene Hamilton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### November Herb of the Month— Flavors of Thanksgiving

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

This year the Hamilton clan will gather in Waxahachie with three generations forward to our grandsons and their cousins. We have invited twenty-four to share the feast. In addition to Texas and Oklahoma, they will be traveling from California, Colorado, and Louisiana. If the weather cooperates, dinner will be served in the garden.

The king of the feast is of course, the turkey, but the queen for the day is the stuffing. Yes, I do stuff the bird. Getting the seasonings just right is important. A lesson I learned the hard way many years ago is you can add more sage or rosemary, but you can't take it away if you have over seasoned.

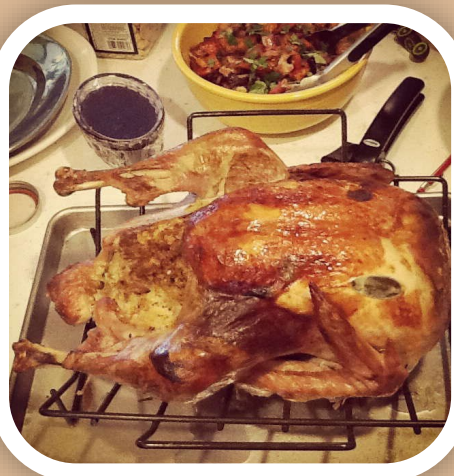
My mother-in-law used only sage in her stuffing, but I love a more blended flavor and include some thyme, marjoram, parsley, and a little rosemary. Since moving to Texas, I have switched from dried herbs to fresh. What a treat it is to go to the herb garden in late November and gather bundles of green herbs for the stuffing, as well as many of the side dishes.

Our niece Krista always prepares the rosemary smashed potatoes. A little lemon thyme added to the sweet potatoes has everyone asking, "what is the little something extra?" Add some chopped fresh mint to the peas for a tasty twist.

Try tucking several sprigs of sage, parsley, and thyme, and one sprig of rosemary under the turkey, along with some celery, carrots, and onion to flavor the gravy broth. Fresh sage leaves tucked under the skin of the turkey and butter rubbed over the skin deepens the flavors, crisps the skin, and has guests reaching for the camera. Bunches of onion and garlic chives along with salad burnet and cilantro add zest to the salad.

Last year, everyone received a jar of homemade sage-cranberry jelly as a favor. This year I plan to make herbes de Provence jelly for all. A few sprigs of basil, fennel, marjoram, savory, thyme, Mexican mint marigold (to replace the tarragon), and a pinch of lavender flowers makes a sweet treat to be served with cheese and crackers. Again, all of the herbs are still fresh and green in the Texas garden.

If you are making a custard pumpkin pie for dessert, 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.



No matter where you celebrate Thanksgiving this year, I hope it will be with people you love.

For more tips on growing herbs in Texas and general horticulture information, visit the master gardener booth at the Downtown Waxahachie Farmers Market. The market will be open every Saturday through December 21, at 410 South Rogers Street.



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



## Getting the Yard Ready for the Cold

With Nancy Fenton  
Ellis County Master Gardener



There are a few things that still need to be done in the yard before we get to the freezes. If you haven't fertilized the yard yet, it's not too late if you do it right away. A well-balanced blend will feed the grass and help it make it through our winter.

Hopefully you have soaked your yard after this long dry August and September and then turned off your sprinklers and will leave them off this winter. Lawns need moisture in the winter, but most years the natural kind is enough.

Watering weekly puts too much moisture in the ground and encourages the bad guys that like to chew on the grass roots. It also leads to rot problems and high water bills!

It's not too late to plant those spring blooming bulbs if you get on it soon. I choose the ones that will naturalize and come up year after year. Just dig a hole, throw in some earthworm castings, put the bulb in, and cover with soil that is about twice the depth of the diameter of the bulb. Add a little water and you're set.

Bulbs don't even have to go into a prepared bed since they are finished blooming by the time the grass is ready to be mowed. Mine are creekside and

under trees that will shade out everything else come June. You can enjoy the blooms next spring and the next and the next!

The beds and flowers can all use a "mulch check" about now. Three inches is a good number to protect roots and tender canes. (You can use the "three finger method; that is, you stick your hand down into the mulch and if it hits the compacted layer at about the palm, you have about three inches.)

I use the leaves from the many trees around after grinding them in my mower so I don't have to worry about weight on the small plants. The leaves will decompose over the winter and add to the soil for next years' blooms. Don't forget the free mulch at the Waxahachie Recycling center. It works well for larger plantings, trees, and other large bushes.

Now is also the time to check your outdoor water faucets (also called hose bibs). I cover mine with those foam boxes they carry at our local hardware stores. I've seen frozen, split pipes and I don't want to see them ever again.

If you get the covers in November, you won't have to race out the first day it's scheduled to freeze and look for them. (Done that, too!) Don't forget your

tools. They probably all need a bit of cleaning up and a light coat of oil to protect them from the rust. The handles all love a bit of oil and they won't break as easily next spring!

When they finally do forecast a hard freeze (in the 20's), a quick drink of water before bedtime will help the tender plants in the beds. Grass that is healthy shouldn't have a problem if the temperature goes up above freezing or if it gets sun at all the next day.

Its growth cycle is really on hold when the days get short and the temperature cold. Nothing like those hot days of August when it is growing even at night if the temperature is about 75 degrees. (Yes, it really does grow and grow!!)

Watch the thermometer and your rain gauge. Finally, start thinking about all those pretty plants you wanted to put in your yard last year, but didn't quite get to. The catalogs will be coming full of good ideas. Start planning, but don't buy yet. We still have a while to wish!



### What's Happening (Continued from page 1)

**Saturday, November 16, 9am–12pm, Cedar Ridge Preserve—Conservation in Action Workday.** Volunteers help remove non-native plants, restore trails, and work in the butterfly garden. Water, snacks, pruning shears, shovels, and work gloves provided. Contact: [info\\_CRP@yahoo.com](mailto:info_CRP@yahoo.com) or visit [www.audubondallas.org](http://www.audubondallas.org). Location: 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway, Dallas.

**Saturday, November 23, 12pm–5pm, Brumley Gardens Holiday Open House.** FREE gift bag to first 100 guests! Food, fun, local entertainment, door prizes, in-store specials, **pictures with Santa**, and holiday gift ideas. For more info, call (214) 942-0794 or visit <http://www.brumleygardens.com/home/>. Sign up for the newsletter and receive coupons for \$ off purchases. **Bishop Arts Location—700 West Davis, Dallas.**

**Saturday, November 23, 9am–12pm, Dogwood Canyon—Fourth Saturday Workday.** Help with trail-building, habitat management and much more. For info, contact Julie Collins at [jcollins@audubon.org](mailto:jcollins@audubon.org).

**Monday, November 25, 7pm–8pm, Indian Trail Master Naturalists presents "How and Where to Report Bird Sightings"** by Dr. Tania Homayoun, Sr. Manager for Conservation and Education, Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center. This talk will introduce the many ways birdwatchers of all skill levels can contribute their observations to a variety of ongoing citizen science programs, such as Project FeederWatch, Christmas Bird Count, and local programs like the Trinity Bird Count. The presentation will also give a tour of eBird, a powerful tool for sharing and recording your bird observations. 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)



## Landscape Gardening

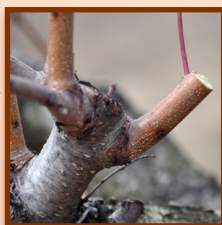
From: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

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.

### Pruning Trees

#### Things Not to Do:

- Do not top your tree. Topping is unfortunately a common practice designed to encourage vigorous new growth. While that is achieved, the overall strength and structure of the tree are sacrificed. The limbs that are forced from latent buds are very often weakly attached, which makes them susceptible to wind damage. Pollarding is often confused with topping, but this practice is followed by thinning, and is more technically demanding. Many Europeans utilize this practice to dwarf their trees.

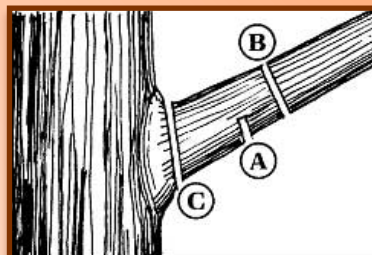


- Do not make stub cuts. Do not leave a portion of the branch sticking out; this will allow rot to enter more easily.
- Do not remove all of the lower limbs on newly planted trees. This is sometimes referred to as 'limbing up'. Some of the lower branches should be left intact for a period of time to encourage caliper growth. No more than one-third of the top growth on younger trees should be removed.

- Do not make cuts flush with the trunk or adjoining limb. The proper cut is made flush with the collar at the base of the branch. The collar is the somewhat raised area surrounding the branch union with the parent branch or trunk. This zone contains chemically-protective tissue; if it is cut off or severely cut into, proper natural 'healing' cannot occur. And, once this area is damaged, it is damaged for good. Trees have the unique ability to compartmentalize, or surround in-

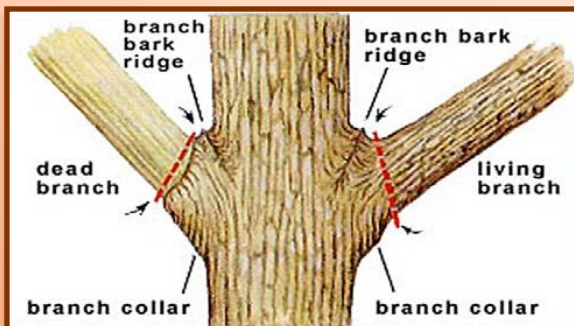
jured tissues with a protective barrier.

- Do not cut large limbs with a one-cut method. This will surely result in bark peeling from the weight of the cut limb. Rather, use the three-cut method.
- Do not use pruning paints or wound dressings. They do not encourage 'healing', nor do they prevent pathogens from entering the tree. Although they will not damage the tree, they will certainly prove to be an unwarranted cost. Painting could be justified where aesthetics are concerned. A dark paint can hide the glaring spots made from fresh wood being exposed from a recent cut.



#### Things to Do:

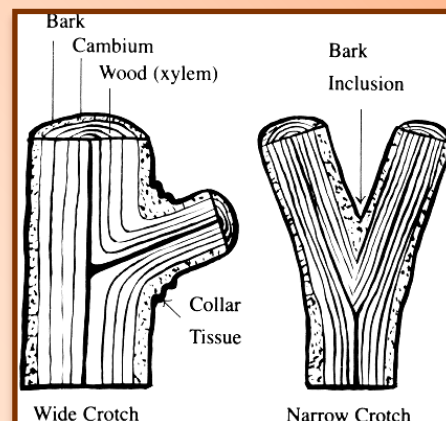
- Do approach the tree, and look for any limbs that might be a hazard to someone underneath it or to a building or structure nearby. Broken branches, weak branches, narrow crotch angles, and other obvious faults should be identified. First and foremost, these limbs should be taken care of.



- Do remove any dead or dying material on the tree.
- Do remove limbs that are rubbing

each other or cross over one another. Limbs that rub will develop wounds that attract insects and diseases.

- Do remove excessive vertical sprouts. Some may need to be left in place to encourage caliper growth.
- Do prune to encourage fruiting. In the case of fruit trees, thinning out of limbs will allow allocation of nutrients, etc., for fruit production. In addition, practices such as open-center pruning allow sunlight penetration for fruit ripening.



- Do choose to keep branches with wide crotch angles. Wide crotch angles are generally from 40 to 90 degrees, and are very strong as a result of being composed of solid wood. Narrow crotch angles are less than 40 degrees, and contain a bark inclusion that causes them to be very weak. Narrow crotch angles should preferably be pruned out while the tree is still young. In older, established trees, bracing and cabling may be the only resort.
- Do prune the tree to your liking. There are many different ways that one particular tree may be pruned.

(Continued on page 7)

Landscape Gardening (Continued from page 6)

Even experts will have differing opinions on which branches to remove. The bottom line is: whatever you like is what you should do, so long as you utilize proper cutting techniques and pruning methods.

- Do keep in mind that you should always have a reason for every cut that is made.

*This article by Brad Abrameit, Extension Horticulturist and Master Gardener Coordinator for Rio Grande Valley, appeared in "Valley Master Gardeners," Vol. 1, No. 8, May 1997. Some of the material was from a workshop by Don Mueller, of the Texas Forest Service*

### Garden Checklist for November-December 2013

*Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist, TX A&M AgriLife Extension*

- Roses often put on some of their best displays in the November-December period of cooler weather. Encourage them at this time with plenty of water during dry spells and good cultivation, finishing with a topping of fresh mulch to save moisture and ameliorate temperature changes.
- 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. In addition to ordering seeds that you are already familiar with, try a few new kinds each year to broaden your garden contents.



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



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- 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. Be sure to refrigerate tulips and hyacinths for six to eight weeks prior to planting.
- 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 opening



doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.

- Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.
- Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time in December if 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 catalogs 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.

## Fall Garden Clean Up

By Marilyn Simmons  
Ellis County Master Gardener Intern



We are a couple weeks out from our first frost and it is time to think about prepping our gardens for the winter months. Even though our average frost date is November 13<sup>th</sup>, frost cloth and blankets might extend your growing season for a week or so. By Thanksgiving, it is best to have all the tomatoes and peppers and any remaining warm weather crops harvested.

First order of business is to clean and organize your composting area. If you do not have one, fall is a good time to set up a composting site. Composting is a practice of alternating reusable materials into a pile 3' x 3' or into a compost bin.

Materials are layered into this pile by using dry materials such as brown leaves and dead grass clippings and alternating with a layer, which is referred to as a green layer including items such as potato peels, coffee grounds, or apple peelings.

There are many ways to create a compost pile. It can be as simple as wire strung around four posts to create a barrier that will hold the pile, or purchase a composter at the local garden center. The reward for your efforts of recycling is phenomenal.

Every gardener loves to reach into a completely decayed compost pile for the very best garden soil. Make the most of the fall and winter months by stockpiling homemade compost for spring gardening.

Next, start the vegetable garden fall clean up by removing dead and decaying vegetation. Most of the decaying plants can go into the compost pile. However, tomato plants are susceptible to many diseases and should not be put in your compost pile.

Many garden resources agree that tomato stalks should be either bagged up and removed or destroyed. Weeds should also be removed and destroyed and restricted from the compost pile.

Soil testing should be considered at this time. A soil test will reveal the available nutrients or the lack of mineral and nutrients needed by the vegetable plants. Most of Ellis County has black clay and/or caliche soil.

This soil is generally high alkaline and rich in nutrients, however some nutri-



soil amendments needed for your garden soil.

Expanded shale (pictured left) is a product that absorbs ten times its weight in water. Dr. Steve George of the Texas Cooperative Extension recommends putting down three inches on top of the soil and working it in six to eight inches deep. Expanded shale only has to be added one time.

It is often referred to as the "Clay Buster", because of its ability to break down the clay and allow nutrients to flow through the soil.

Sul-po-mag is a product composed of sulfur, potassium, and magnesium. This comes in a granule form and is easy to distribute. Always apply according to directions on the label.

Dried molasses (pictured below) is a product that will attract beneficial organisms and sweeten the soil. Each year

it is always recommended to add one to two inches of fresh compost to the garden.

Add the amendments to the top of the soil and then plow or turn soil. Turning the soil will also bring the eggs of insects to the top of the soil and hopefully, a cold winter

will destroy some of the insects.

Finally, some gardeners plant a cover crop to restore nutrients and provide insect and weed control. Elbon Rye is a recommended cover crop. This can be purchased from seed catalogs.

Plant the cover crop immediately following the application of the amendments listed above and before a hard freeze. Plow the cover crop under in January or February, just before spring gardening begins.

Fall soil prep is very important to having a viable spring garden. Remember, the soil is the foundation of the garden.



Raised bed with cover crop



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[expo.ecmga@yahoo.com](mailto:expo.ecmga@yahoo.com)

Reserve the date: March 29, 2014!

ents are locked in. A soil test will reveal what nutrients are available in your soil. Using the acquired information will provide accurate judgment on

## Book Review: Free-Range Chicken Gardens

With Ginger Cole  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Recently I was asked to give a presentation on how to include chickens in a home garden. If you have ever had chickens, you know that left unattended, they can decimate a lawn or garden in record time. Did you ever see the movie Jurassic Park? If so, do you remember how the dinosaurs probed the fence for a way out? Chickens do that, too.

The scene in the kitchen where the velociraptors were chasing the children around trying to eat them is not far from what a chicken will do to anything small enough for them to swallow. They have keen eyesight, are amazingly fast, and persistent.

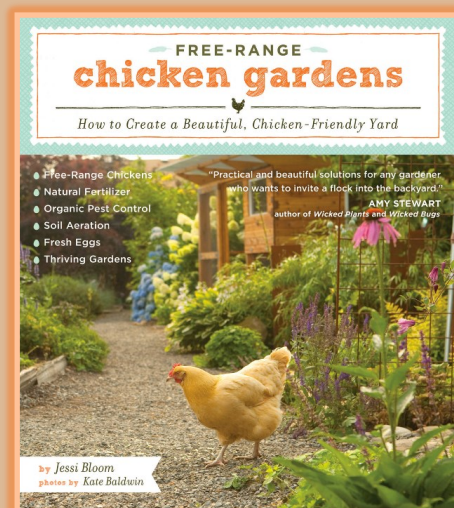
It seems to me that chickens are just pint-sized velociraptors with feathers. It's good they are small. Other than pecking at toe nail polish or a freckle on my leg, my chickens have little interest in me as a meal. They are omnivores and will eat small mice, snakes, and a variety of insects.

Chickens produce wonderful fertilizer for your lawn or garden. The trick lies in how to include chickens into the landscape in a way that is beneficial and not detrimental.

As Master Gardeners, we are often called to do educational presentations. In this case, I needed to first educate myself on some creative ways to incorporate chickens into a lawn and garden area.

My chickens free range on the "back 40" of our two acre lot. On rare occasions, I may let "the girls" range around in the garden. Generally, they are only

allowed in the garden when I will be with them all day and it is between seasons. I let them help me to prepare the garden beds and eliminate insects. I needed to find some novel ways to safely allow chickens to be regular garden or lawn visitors.



I Googled around and found a wonderful book, "Free-Range Chicken Gardens" by Jessie Bloom with fabulous photos by Kate Baldwin. As luck would have it, our local Hastings Book Store had a copy.

This is a wonderful resource for anyone who would like to incorporate chickens into their landscape. Chickens are the pets "with benefits". How many other pets can provide you with breakfast and not have to give their lives for it? Whether you have existing landscape or are starting a new yard or garden, this book has many practical ideas. In addition

to landscaping ideas, it provides an overview of caring for chickens including predator-proof housing, what types of chicken breeds you may want, how many to keep, and hardscape materials for ease of maintenance.

Most of the landscape designs, once established, are fairly low maintenance and low water usage. The lawns and garden areas are designed to allow the chickens to "assist" with keeping pests to a minimum and "pruning and mowing". I regularly reach for this book to come up with creative solutions for letting nature help with me with my garden chores.

The only down side to the book is that the author lives in the northwest. I must say, the photos make me jealous of their soil and climate. Some of the plants are not recommended varieties for our Texas heat. That is easily remedied by using local plant resources such as Texas Smartscapes™ to help select plants that will thrive here.

(<http://www.txsmartscapes.com/>)

If you are seeking an innovative way to more effectively use your lawn as an attractive sustainable living space, "Free-Range Chicken Gardens" by Jessie Bloom is a great place to start.

Don't forget the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association has a speakers bureau covering a wide variety of topics. If you would like a speaker for your group, contact the Ellis County Agrilife Extension Office at (972) 825-5175 or send an email to [ellismg@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ellismg@ag.tamu.edu).

above all earthly blessings

above all earthly joys

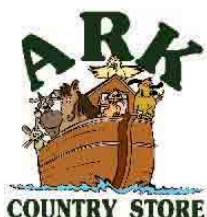
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