



Ellis County Master Gardener's Ellis-Gardening Newsletter



Volume I, Issue 2

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

March, 2007

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

What's Happening in March

Saturday, March 3, 10:00 - 3:00 - The Greenery. All Day Organic Day - Line up will include rain water harvesting, Lady Bugs Organic Products' rep. talking about their produces, The Rep. from Harvest Supply Co., out of Ft. Worth, discussing the organic products they have available. For further information please contact Marilyn at The Greenery, 972-617-5459

Saturday, March 10, 10:15 - Calloway's Nursery, "EarthKind" roses. Ellis County Master Gardeners **James Kocian**, will be at the South Arlington store, **Nancy Fenton**, at the Duncanville Callaway's. **Jim Suggs**, at the North Arlington Calloway's.

Saturday, March 10, 9:00 am - The Greenery. Vegetable Gardening. **Robert Shugart**, Ellis County Master Gardener, will be covering many aspects of gardening, including seed varieties for our climate and soil preparation.

Saturday, March 10, 10:30 am - Petal Pusher's Garden Emporium, Cedar Hill. "Landscaping with Natives, by Native Dave. **1:00 pm** - Perennials and Old Garden Roses with Vicki Thaxton.

Monday, March 12, 7:00 pm - The Greenery. Vegetable Gardening. This class will be collecting information from area gardeners on tape. If you are a vegetable gardener, call Marilyn @ 972-617-5459, give her your gardening tips so she can include your information in the presentation.

Saturday, March 17, 9-5 pm - Ellis County Master Gardener's 7th Annual EXPO, Waxahachie Civic Center

Saturday, April 14, 10:30 - Pedal Pusher's Garden Emporium, Cedar Hill. English Gardening-Texas Style, speaker Andrea Rucker, Dallas MG, from the United Kingdom. **1:00 pm**, "Petal Pusher's Picks", by Rosa Finley. Website: www.petalpushersgarden.net.

Lighthouse for Learning

(with the Master Gardeners)

For reservations, call 972-923-4631, ask for Melissa Cobb

Thursday, March 1 - 6-7:30 pm - **Bat Conservation**. Instructor: **Jamey Guarascio-Cosper**. Learn why bats are vital to our ecosystem and what impact they have in Ellis County specifically.

Monday, March 5 - 6:00 - 7:30 pm - **Native Plants**. Instructor: **Bill Abbott**. Learn what plants are Native and how easy these plants adapt to your garden.

Thursday, March 8 - 6:00 - 7:30 pm - **Planning and Preparing your Vegetable Garden**. Instructor: **Nancy Prikryl**. Soil preparation and planning tips to plan and organize your vegetable garden.

Monday, April 2 - 6:00 - 7:00 pm - **Cream Soups & Cornbread**. Instructor: **Melinda Kocian**. Learn how to make delicious cream of soups in a short amount of time. What a wonderful way of using all your fresh vegetables from the garden.

Thursday, April 19 - 6:00 - 8:00 pm - **Plant Propagation**. Instructors: Lois Yarborough and Melinda Kocian. Learn to create new plants from existing plants.

Lawn and Garden Expo – Learning at Its Best!

Our 7th Annual Lawn and Garden Expo is scheduled for Saturday, March 17, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Waxahachie Civic Center. This year, the range of learning opportunities for the public has expanded to include fun gardening activities for children and a broader selection of activities for all others.

Keynote speakers. The day includes three keynote speakers offering information sought by regional lawn and garden enthusiasts.

- 9:00 a.m. EarthKind – Dr. Steve George (Statewide Extension Coordinator of EarthKind Environmental Landscape Management Program)
- 12:30 p.m. Plants That Take the Heat and Keep on Blooming – Dottie Woodson (Tarrant County Extension Horticulturalist)
- 2:00 p.m. Perfecting the Landscape – Neil Sperry (Horticultural expert, gardening author)

Breakout Programs. The breakout programs feature four experts with practical information on quite different topics.

- 9:00 a.m. Container Planting – DeAnn Bell (Ellis County Master Gardener)
- 11:00 a.m. Composting – Linda Clemens (Master Composter, Grand Prairie)
- 1:00 p.m. Insect Pests and Treatment – Mark Arnold (Ellis County Extension Agent)
- 3:00 p.m. Rainwater Harvesting – Shirley Campbell and Arlene Hamilton (Ellis County Master Gardeners)

Plant Sale. The popular Plant Sale is the first stop for many regular attendees. The sale features native plants and those with low-water use requirements – all propagated/grown by Master Gardeners. We will be there in force, answering question, consulting resources when needed, and of course, selling plants! There is learning for everyone here.

Master Gardeners' Information Booth. Located adjacent to the Plant Sale area, the Information Booth is where attendees pose their most troublesome questions. In turn, members – both experienced and those in training – provide answers, distribute pertinent Extension publications and/or take notes when further research and later contact is required. We'll also be selling selected gardening-related products here (e.g., our gardening aprons, cookbooks, butterfly and flower wheels).

Children's Gardening Workshops. Several fun hands-on educational opportunities for children will be available at 10 a.m., 2 pm and 4 p.m. To participate, children need to be accompanied by an adult.

Exhibitor Booths. This aspect of the Expo is packed with learning opportunities. By strolling the aisles of over 100 profit and nonprofit booths you see the latest gardening products, meet those who can help implement gardening ideas, and talk with club representatives who share your interests.

It's EXPO Time!

Come join the Ellis County Master Gardener's for our 7th Annual Lawn and Garden EXPO! What a wonderful opportunity to meet with local business and some not too far away, that can assist you in planning your new projects for spring and summer.

We want to thank our sponsors: The Greenery, Waxahachie Daily Light, KBEC 1390, Waxahachie Civic Center, The Boyce Feed and Grain Corp., Vintage Bank, ARK Country Store, Urban Farmers, H-E-B Waxahachie, Pettigrew Academy, CNB of Texas, Holcim (Texas), LP, Patio Scapes, Tex-Scapes Greenery, Roland's Nursery & Landscape, Gardenscapes By Diane and Petal Pusher's Garden Emporium.

You can go to any of these locations and pick up free tickets; otherwise, the cost is \$3.00 at the door.

We have a wonderful, exciting show for you again this year; only it is going to be bigger and better than ever!

GARDEN TALK

By Homer McCain

Ellis County Master Gardener

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO PREVENT SUMMER WEEDS

Weeds, they are the bane of every gardener. Those in the flower or vegetable garden can easily be pulled or controlled by applying mulch. Weeds in the lawn, however, are a different story, especially if there is a serious infestation. There is an adage that says, "a weed is just a flower in the wrong place." There may be some truth in that. A purple wave of henbit (a common winter broadleaf weed) may be a scenic wildflower along the roadside, but in my yard, it's in the wrong place.

If you see weeds already growing in your lawn they are probably winter annual weeds or grasses that germinated last fall. Most of these can be eliminated by simply hand weeding, or mowing. Winter annuals will die once the weather warms up in the spring. However, their seeds will germinate next fall and the cycle starts over again.

A pre-emergent herbicide applied late last September could have prevented many of these weeds from sprouting. However, it's not too late to put down a pre-emergent to prevent the germination of summer weeds in the lawn if you do it before the middle of March.

There is a pre-emergent herbicide for broadleaf weeds, and another one for grasses. Check with your nursery to find out which product to use. There are some products that combine both pre-emergents into one herbicide. A pre-emergent applied in the spring, can injure some grasses such as St. Augustine, so always follow the directions on the label. Remember that a pre-emergent does not eliminate weeds that are already actively growing. Like the name implies, it only prevents seeds from emerging from the soil. It does not prevent the re-growth of existing perennial weeds and grasses such as dandelions, or Dallasgrass, as they will come up the following year from their roots.

Good turf management is the key to controlling weeds in a lawn. This means proper fertilization, mowing, and watering at the appropriate time so the grass becomes dense and thick. A strong turf will eventually crowd out most weeds so that herbicides will not be needed.

So you might ask what about existing weeds? The answer to that question depends on the condition of the lawn. The drought this past two years has taken its toll on many lawns. Assuming your lawn is in good shape, but due to size of the area hand weeding would not be practical, you might consider a post emergent herbicide. However, always use physical means of eliminating weeds before resorting to chemical controls. There are herbicides that are approved for use on lawn grasses such as Bermuda and St. Augustine. In fact, using a post-emergent herbicide is about the only way to eliminate established perennial weeds in a lawn short of digging them out. Apply it on lawns where weeds have become established and are actively growing. On the other hand, a pre-emergent is applied before seeds start to germinate.

The type of post-emergent will depend on the kind of weeds that are present. Two types of weeds most commonly found in lawns are broadleaf, and grassy. There are herbicides on the market for each. You want to make sure you get the right ones because a herbicide for grassy plants will not work on broadleaf ones, and vice versa. If you don't know a broad leaf weed from a grassy weed take weed samples to your local nursery or to your Cooperative Extension office to identify. An easy way to remember is that if a weed contains the word grass, for example, crabgrass, or Dallasgrass, it's usually a grassy weed. If you are not sure, get help from a knowledgeable source.

I try limiting the use of post-emergents in my lawn to spot treatments only and then with extreme caution. Any herbicide for that matter, used inappropriately, can kill or injure desirable grasses, trees and shrubs. Again, always read and follow the directions and information, including the fine print, on the label before buying or using any product.

The elimination of perennial weeds along with good turf management, and applications of pre-emergent in the fall and early spring should eventually restore your lawn back to good health. If you have any questions concerning your lawn, please call the Ellis County Extension office at (972) 825-5175, Monday through Friday, 8:30-12:00 and 1:00-5:00. A Master Gardener will be glad to help you.

My green thumb came only as a result of the mistakes I made while learning to see things from the plant's point of view. ~ H. Fred Ale

It's March - What Needs to be Done?

Planting and Sowing

- Warm-season annuals that were started in January will be ready to transplant late this month.
- Cantaloupe seeds can be started in peat pots early in the month. Direct-sow green beans and summer squash late-month.
- There is still time to sow your favorite annual seeds in flats to be transplanted out-of-doors when danger of frost is past.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- Begin fertilizing roses with specialty rose food every 4 to 6 weeks from now until September.
- Prune spring-flowering shrubs and vines (flowering quince, azaleas, forsythia, bridal wreath, Lady Banks rose, coral honeysuckle) immediately after they finish blooming.
- Apply an all-nitrogen fertilizer to pecans on 30-day intervals now through May.

This and That

- Check with your County Extension Office for the average last freeze date for your area. Although killing freezes

can, and do, occur after this date, it is a fairly accurate indicator.

- Select and order caladium tubers and coleus plants for later planting. Avoid planting caladiums until soil temperatures reach 70 degrees F.
- Get ready for spring planting by making final preparations to beds and garden area

Garden Watch

- Treat susceptible rose varieties with fungicide and systemic insecticide to protect against black spot, powdery mildew, aphids and thrips. Repeat at regular intervals during periods of high humidity and rainfall.

Monthly Tip:

Xeriscaping incorporates seven basic principals, not just plants.

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|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1) Planning and Design | 5) Effective irrigation |
| 2) Soil analysis | 6) Use of mulches |
| 3) Practical turf areas | 7) Appropriate maintenance |
| 4) Appropriate plant selection | |

Featured Plant for March

Bluebonnets (Native)

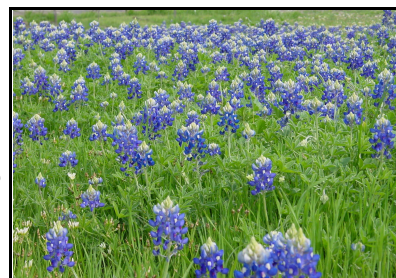
Lupinus texensis 'Bluebonnet'

Annual perennial spring wildflower germinates from seed in the fall. Flowers have wonderful fragrance, are native to Texas, and our state flower. Plant seeds in late summer to early fall, do not fertilize.

Exposure: Sun

Size: Ht 9-12" Spread 12-15"

Spacing: 35 lbs of seed per acre



Did you Know?

By Betty Reuscher, Ellis County Master Gardener

From Backyard Living

You can receive ten trees—free—that is, after you send the \$10 membership fee. The National Arbor Day Foundation allows you a choice of an all-redbud package, flowering trees, or trees for fall color among others. The only drawback is that the trees are very small and bareroot—from six to ten inches. They will be mailed at the proper planting time for our area along with planting instructions. You may contact them at www.arborday.org or The National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Avenue, Nebraska City, NE, 68410 or call 1-888-448-7337.

The Arbor Day Foundation reminds readers that trees boost the market value of the homestead, reduce the cost of air-conditioning, lower heating costs by 20 percent to 50 percent, and reduce stress among test subjects. Perhaps

the most impressive reason to include more trees in the landscape is that one acre of trees absorbs six tons of carbon dioxide and produces four tons of oxygen. That's enough fresh air to sustain 18 people for a year.

News from the Hot New Plants Department: Watch for new varieties of some old favorites. With blossoms reminiscent of Mutabilis, the new 'Rainbow Knock Out' Rose is the All-America Rose Selections Winner for 2007. 'Tropicanna Black' Canna (Canna indica) features deep purple-black leaves and starkly-contrasting red flowers. Look for a new coneflower called 'Raspberry Tart' (Echinacea purpurea) that shows off raspberry-magenta blooms that are sweetly scented.

Cream of Asparagus Soup
(fresh from the garden)

There is nothing like fresh asparagus from your very own garden! I planted my asparagus plants 9 years ago and we have been enjoying them so much every spring since. February is the best time to plant asparagus - mark your calendars for next year and plant some in your garden. In the meantime, buy asparagus at the grocery store and try my recipe. Umm good!

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| 1 ½ cups chicken broth | 2 tablespoons butter |
| ½ cup chopped onion | 2 tablespoons flour |
| 2 cups asparagus, cut into
1" long pieces | Salt/pepper to taste |
| 1 teaspoon lemon juice | 1 cup milk |

In a saucepan combine chicken broth, chopped onion and asparagus. Bring mixture to boiling. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 8 minutes. Place half of the mixture in a blender. Cover and blend 30-60 seconds or until smooth. Pour into a bowl. Repeat with remaining mixture; set all aside.

In the same saucepan, melt the butter. Stir in flour, salt and pepper, cook for 2-3 minutes so the flour won't taste pasty. Add the milk, all at once. Cook and stir until mixture is thickened and bubbly. Stir in the blended asparagus mixture. Continue to stir until the soup is heated through. Season to taste with salt/pepper, if necessary.

Yield: 3 to 4 servings.

Compliments of:
Melinda Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener

For information on how to plant and grow asparagus, go to the Ellis County Master Gardener's website: www.ECMGA.com, click on publications. Go to the gardening sheets; select Asparagus.

2007 Gardening Calendar Now Available!

The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to announce the publication of their first Gardening calendar. The full color calendar features a plant of the month, along with helpful information on planting, fertilizing, pruning and maintenance of your lawn and gardens each month.

A special **Thank You** goes out to our sponsors; it would not have been possible without them. Many of the sponsors also include money saving coupons on the coupon pages in the back of the calendar. You may contact our sponsors for your **free calendar**.

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| Action Automatic Sprinklers | Landmark Equipment | Roland's |
| Action Fire Alarm, LLC | Natural Stone Works | Stone River Landscape & Irrigation |
| Back Yard Haven Pools & Spas | Natural Water Works | Tex-Scapes Greenery |
| Boyce Feed & Grain | Organigro | The Animal Care Center |
| Cancun's & Acapulco's | Paint & Paper Plus | The Greenery |
| Gardenscapes By Diane | Pam Daniel at Ebby Halliday | Travis Equipment |
| Jeanette's Custom Embroidery | Patio Scapes | Urban Farmers |

Seed Balls* - Seed balls are a way to distribute seed. Using this method you can put seed over a large area, over an area you don't want to cultivate, and in waste areas. This method encourages the seeds to germinate at the proper time, when conditions are best for the plants to thrive. When you plant a seed in the dirt, you are telling it to start growing. When you toss out a seed ball, you are leaving the germination up to Mother Nature.

Recipe: 1¼ cup dry terra cotta clay, purchased at craft stores, ¾ cup organic compost, ¼ cup seeds, mixed or the same. Combine ingredients with enough water to make it mixable and moldable. Form into balls about the size of marbles. Let them dry in the sun for a few days. Toss out where you want the plants to grow.

Depending on your seed choice, you can have a field of wild-flowers, a patch of plants to attract beneficial insects, or a tasty herbal garden. Experiment and explore. This is a fun project for young and old. And if you don't have clay, just use dirt.

Suggested seeds to attract beneficial insects: Clover, alfalfa, alyssum, nasturtium, yarrow, carrot, dill, daikon, celery, radish, fennel, caraway, chervil, gypsophila, coriander, calendula, mustard, anise hyssop, phacelia, agastache, and amaranth.

*<http://www.pathtofreedom.com/pathproject/gardening/seedballs.shtml>



EarthKind™ News

by James Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener

Landscape Development

Developing a landscape for homes and businesses can pose unique challenges. Careful attention to improving environmental conditions through soil preparation, proper after-planting care, and efficient irrigation practices are essential. There are no hard and fast rules, since conditions vary from location to location but by following some basic Earth Kind principles your chances for success will be greatly increased. It's been proven, through national research, that the EarthKind method works. Try the EarthKind soil preparation on your next landscape or garden project and prove to yourself that it works.

Site selection

- Full sun is very important for many ornamentals and vegetables.
- Good air movement over leaf surfaces will aid greatly in prevention of foliar diseases.
- Adequate drainage to insure water doesn't collect or stand in the planting area. Construction of raised beds and addition of organic matter are extremely important for proper root growth and will provide necessary drainage.

Soil Preparation

- Soil testing is advised to ensure plants get nutrients they need while it helps to avoid the expense, effort and possible contamination which results from unnecessary fertilizer applications.
- Historically most people appear to spend more of their landscape budget on plants rather than soil preparation, when just the opposite is what should be the case. Proper soil preparation will lead to healthier, more vigorous plant growth and the need for less water and increased drought resistance.
- Our EarthKind method is really very simple. One new ingredient needed for our Ellis County heavy clay soil is 'expanded shale'. Expanded shale is a gravel size rock that has been super heated to make it "pop" creating air cavities within it. Expanded shale aerates our clay soil giving the plant roots needed oxygen, makes it easier to work and helps it drain better. Best of all, it only has to be added one time.
- Till in 3" of expanded shale.
- Till in 3" of well finished compost.

Plant Selection

- We recommend using native and adapted plants. Those that will grow and perform well in our Ellis County heat and dry conditions without a lot of care. These plants can be found listed on our website (ECMGA.COM) or from the Master Gardeners office.
- Dr. Steve George will have a discussion of the EarthKind planting method at our EXPO on March 17, as well as discuss the EarthKind roses you need to have in your landscape. Look for some of these roses from our exhibitors at the EXPO.
- EarthKind roses are beautiful, hardy, heat and drought tolerant, disease resistant and come in many colors and forms. These are the varieties that anyone can grow.

Maintenance

- After planting the landscape you need to mulch the beds with 3" of native tree trimmings. These are usually readily available and are free in many cities. If not a good hardwood mulch can also be used.
- Check the mulch depth once or twice a year and maintain the mulch at 3 inches. The mulch will break down creating new compost fertilizer for your plants. Mulch will keep the roots cooler in summer and helps retain moisture in the soil. Once your plants are established they will require much less water.

Salvias are Proven Performers

By Diane Hopkins, Master Gardener

Salvias were popular in early Texas gardens and are being rediscovered as a beautiful, practical source of landscape color. There are always places in a garden to use salvia for its color and character of its flowers and foliage. A gardener can count

on the perennial species' to bloom year after year just like clockwork. Their versatility allows them to be planted in a formal flower bed or along the edge of an alleyway. They are naturals for use in large containers, as massed bedding plants or a landscape specimen.

Salvia Greggii, commonly known as Au-

tumn Sage, is a fall-flowering sub-shrub. Most of its branches originate near the base of the plant, giving a vase-shaped appearance. The foliage has a pleasant, spicy scent and its tube-shaped flowers can be found in a broad range of colors. The popular purplish-red selections have been

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joined in recent years by pure white, rich red, pink and salmon. *Salvia Greggii* occurs in southwest Texas, New Mexico and into Mexico. Once established, it usually thrives on existing rainfall. It requires well-drained soil, and thrives in full-sun or partially-shaded exposures.

Another favorite is *Salvia leucantha*, commonly known as Mexican Bush Sage. This stately beauty has earned its stripes because of its drought tolerance, pest resistance, and adaptability to a wide range of soils, including alkaline clay and acid sands.

It is a late summer and fall blooming tender perennial. The sturdy silver-gray foliaged plant can reach three feet or more in height. Its dramatic blooms are velvety spikes of violet-purple and white. *Salvia*

leucantha is a Mexican native that prefers sunny, well-drained sites. It will survive with no supplemental irrigation in most parts of Texas. To promote an abundance of flowering spikes, the plant should be sheared several times during the summer months. The subsequent regrowth will produce a sturdier more compact plant. In Ellis County, it may be necessary to protect the roots and crown from extremely cold winter weather by covering with a thick layer of organic mulch.

Salvia farinacea 'Henry Duelberg' is a native perennial found by Greg Grant in a small central Texas cemetery. It will reach a height of 2-3 feet and has square stems with long, narrow leaves which grow in clusters. It will bloom vigorously from spring until frost with spikes of showy blue flowers that have a sage fragrance. It re-

quires full sun and medium to low irrigation.

Mexican Bush Sage and Henry Duelberg *salvia* have received the Texas Superstar designation by the Texas Extension Service. To receive this designation a plant is tested for at least three years to make sure they will perform effectively throughout most if not all of the state. They are found to be easy care, attractive ornamentals with minimal care.

In preparation for our annual Lawn & Garden Expo our Master Gardeners have been planting and tending a variety of plants. Among those plants are several species of *salvia* which will be available in our plant booth. Make plans to attend on March 17th at the Waxahachie Civic Center and select one for your landscape.

Planning a Vegetable Garden

By Diane Hopkins, Master Gardener

Nothing tastes quite as good as the food you have raised yourself. A well-planned vegetable garden can provide a full season's vegetables for an average family. Encouraging family members to join in the planting and harvesting of the produce will provide opportunities to exercise together, promote healthy eating habits and spend valuable time together.

Locate your garden in an open area with good drainage, plenty of sunlight and a supply of water. All vegetables require good drainage and will benefit from raised beds that will allow you to control the soil mix. The ideal vegetable garden soil is deep, friable and rich in organic matter. Proper soil preparation provides the basis for good seed germination and growth of garden crops. A patch of ground that receives six to eight hours of sunlight will be needed to be successful with fruit-producing vegetables such as tomatoes and beans. Root crops and leafy vegetables

will perform well with slightly less sunlight. Your site should be convenient to a water source, moving long hoses in the hot summer can be extremely labor intensive.

The size of your garden should be decided based on the amount of time you can devote to it and the number of people tending it. Starting small will allow you to increase the size following your initial successes. To get optimum use of the area don't let spaces lie idle, when you're through with one crop, plant another. Follow cool season crops with warm season vegetables. Interplant fast-growing crops between slow growing vegetables. Each vegetable needs a certain space to grow. Do not crowd plants into less space than they require. Plant tall vegetables, such as corn and pole beans, where they won't shade other plants

Prepare a list of your family's favorite vegetables ranked in order of preference. This can be a useful guide in deciding how much of each crop to plant. There is no

value in taking up gardening space with vegetables that no one eats. To avoid producing more than you can possibly eat plan to plant short rows of fast-maturing vegetables, such as lettuce and radishes, and make succession plantings at two or three-week intervals.

It is important to learn when each vegetable should be planted. Peas and spinach require cool spring weather. Tomatoes can not be put out until it is certain that there will be no more frost. Lettuce will bolt in the heat of midsummer but will thrive in spring and fall.

To protect vegetables from diseases and discourage pest infestations follow these simple rules. Choose seeds of resistant varieties whenever you can. Carefully inspect store-bought plants for signs of damage and disease. Rotate related crops to prevent the spread of soil-borne diseases. Weed often and dispose of weeds that harbor plant eating pest.

Top Ten Reasons to Garden

By Diane Hopkins, Master Gardener

Not so long ago gardening was a part of daily life, sustenance was provided from working the soil and planting seeds. Ask any gardener why gardening is important to them and you'll get a variety reasons.

According to the National Garden Bureau, the following are the top ten reasons people are gardening today.

- With the recent reports of food-borne illnesses, growing concerns about pesticides in our food supply and processed foods containing unwanted additives and preservatives consumers are choosing to garden to provide safe, healthy food.
- Gardening is a means to get a good workout. Gardening activities provide both cardio and aerobic exercise. Stud-

ies show that an hour of moderate gardening can burn up 300- to 400-hundred calories.

- Gardening can help reduce osteoporosis in older adults, especially women. Mowing the grass compares to a vigorous walk, bending and stretching to plant a garden compares to an exercise

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- class, while hauling plants and soil is similar to weight lifting.
- Gardens add beauty to your home, as well as being satisfying to live in. Trees and shrubs provide color and shade. Containers of colorful flowers near the front door make it more inviting. Herbs in the kitchen add freshness to the room and flavor to daily meals.
- Garden to learn. The more gardeners learn about plants and gardening the more they want to know. Problems encountered in the garden provide an opportunity to find information that will lead to understanding how to keep plants healthy.
- Gardening can add value to your property. The real estate industry estimates that an attractive landscape can increase a home's value by as much as 15 percent. It also creates interest in the house and can mean the difference

- between a potential buyer simply driving by or stopping to take a closer look.
- Gardening is a great way to expand your social circle. Gardeners love to talk about plants with neighbors and other gardeners. Garden clubs, plant organizations and gardening websites are easy ways to share information, ask questions and get involved.
- Gardening provides an outlet for creative and artistic expression. A garden's design can reflect a personal sense of style and provide a showcase for art and sculpture. It's easy to experiment with new plants or change a garden's color scheme every year.
- For people with a competitive streak, gardening is a friendly way to show off their skills. Competitive gardening is fun and provides an opportunity to highlight the best flowers, largest pumpkin, or most luscious tomatoes harvested from the garden.

- A garden might serve as a tranquil retreat or private escape from demands of everyday life. The beauty of flowers can lift spirits, while pulling weeds can be a great release from stress and excess energy. A harvest of beautiful flowers or tasty vegetables provides a sense of achievement and success.

Gardening is an activity that when shared with a child or grandchild can provide lasting memories. Few events compare to witnessing the joy of a child cutting a bouquet of flowers for their mom or tasting the sweetness of a plum picked right from the tree. Even the smallest of gardens provide a beautiful way to remember a special time or person.

Discover your own reason to become a gardener. Gardening is a satisfying activity that provides a lifetime of benefits.



Potting up & Planting Tomatoes

By Diane Hopkins, Master Gardener

Spring is in the air and with it comes the anticipation and preparation of growing luscious, vine-ripened tomatoes. It's too early to put your tomato transplants directly into the garden, but it is a good time to pot them up so they can gain some size while the soil warms up.

Potting up is the practice of buying transplants early and planting them in 1-gallon containers filled with good quality potting soil and fertilizing with 2 tablespoons of slow-release fertilizer designed for containers. Place a transplant in the middle of the container and water it in. If you use a peat pot transplant make sure the peat is soaked and that the lips of the peat pot are below the surface of the soil. Place the pots in a sunny location out of the wind. The container soil heats up quickly, so the plant will put on maximum growth. If temperatures are forecast to drop below 40°F move the containers into a warm location until the temperatures rise.

Potting up allows you to take advantage of the small window of ideal fruit setting

weather. The plants in the pots grow fast and should be in bloom stage by April when they can be placed in the garden just in time to set fruit before the weather gets too warm. Plant them in full sun with 3 to 4 feet between plants. Surround your transplants with a tomato cage to keep the fruit off of the ground.

Save a few of the potted up tomato plants until later in April as insurance for any kind of unusually cold or destructive weather. High winds or hail can be as damaging as freezing temperatures.

Tomatoes are not Xeriscape plants but, if you mulch them with 2 or 3 inches of leaves, compost, or grass clippings and use drip irrigation, they will not waste water. When it is warm and they are loaded with fruit, they must be irrigated every two days. The mulch is especially important to help prevent blossom end rot. Blossom end rot shows up when there is an interruption in the moisture supply to the plant with fruit. Mulch helps keep the soil cool and moist so that roots can function efficiently. Be especially watchful for those days when daily high temperatures jump 10- or

15°F from the day before.

Tomatoes grown in the garden can be fertilized with soluble fertilizers but it is less expensive and just as effective to apply a half cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 around the plant every four weeks.

If you have room for more than one variety of tomato you should select at least two. Every year the weather is a little different and sometimes one variety performs best, the next year another variety will do better. For your garden this year select a good basic table tomato such as Celebrity, Carnival, Merced, or 444. Also, selections of Cherry and Romas are very productive for salads and paste uses, respectively.

In preparation for our annual Lawn & Garden Expo our Master Gardeners have been planting and tending an array of vegetable transplants. Among the transplants are several tomato varieties which will be available in our plant booth. Make plans to attend on March 17th at the Waxahachie Civic Center and select some to pot up for your garden.

Things to Do In March

By Deborah Potter

Ellis County Master Gardener

Week 1 - I would like to take a few minutes of your time to talk about Spring in Ellis County... it's hard to resist the sunshine and fresh air calling us outdoors... new plans or old problems, a new year means fresh starts, so the first thing that a master gardener is going to tell you is to call the Texas Cooperative Extension office, 972-825-5175. That will connect you to your best friend in accomplishing your gardening goals.

It's March...time to begin bed preparation for spring planting by working in organic materials such as compost, sphagnum moss, pine bark; AND another useful amendment in breaking the heavy clay soil of Ellis County is the one-time tilled-in application of Expanded Shale...these items available at most garden centers.

The window for transplanting still dormant large or mature trees and shrubs is closing...also, time to buy those new elements for your yard.

Prune rose bushes using sharp shears for clean cuts; remove dead, dying, or weak canes (not climbing roses until after spring flowering). Roses purchased now should be container grown. I also emphasize that container grown or ball-and-burlap trees or shrubs are your best option for success when purchased at this time of year.

Once again, please call 972-825-5175 to speak with a master gardener regarding more information on any subject mentioned today. Also visit our website, www.ecmga.com.

For a great Spring start, please join all the master gardeners at the 2007 Lawn and Garden Expo, March 17, 9 - 5 pm. Exhibitors, workshops, plant sales, door prizes, and **more** information than you can shake a dead stick at.

Week 2 - Ellis County soils - All soils benefit from organic amendments. Black Gumbo clay, which is a majority of Ellis County, is a story unto itself..."concrete" when dry, "fudge" when wet...it lacks the ability to drain efficiently. The best way to condition this soil is to add organic amendments like compost, sphagnum peat moss, etc. This helps separate the compact molecules of clay from each other...to get water and oxygen to flow

over and around, and through the compact soil, not remain dammed up on top. Another possibility for amended heavy clay soil is Expanded shale. Blue shale is mined throughout Texas; ground to 1" to 1 1/2" particles and kiln fired. As this happens the silica content of the shale expands; after cooling, cavities remain from the escaping gases. What's left is porous lightweight chunks capable of absorbing water to be released slowly.

Prepping for new flower beds comprised of sticky or gumbo-type soils, Dr. Steve George of the Texas Cooperative Extension recommends 3" of a one-time amendment of expanded shale, then tilling it in to a depth of 6"-8". Add 3" of finished, plant-based compost which results in a 6" raised bed. For existing beds you will need to work in organic materials around the plantings.

Thanks for listening and please contact a master gardener at 972-825-5175 if you would like more detailed information...or visit us at www.ecmga.com.

Make plans to attend the Ellis County Master Gardeners 2007 Lawn and Garden Expo, March 17 from 9 am to 5 pm. See you there!

Week 3 - I hope you were able to attend the Lawn and Garden Expo this past weekend. Wow!! Thanks to all the citizens who make it a pleasure to do what we do as master gardeners.

For all of you that were unable to take advantage of the freebies at the Expo, please drop by the Texas Cooperative Extension office and pick up free soil test kits. You'll find that the relatively small task of having your soil tested can make a huge impact on accomplishing your gardening goals. Soil can differ from front yard to back, so pick up enough for your needs.

Did you finish pruning those roses? You can get clean cuts with sharp shears to remove weak, dying, or dead canes, leaving 4 to 8 healthy canes. Remove approximately 1/2 of the top growth height of the plant. Do not prune climbing roses, merely train the long canes by weaving them through openings in the trellis, arbor, etc. Securing these canes will prevent damage from strong winds

(this is after all Texas in March...)...and contribute to a more refined look during blooming season. Please wait until after the spring flowering to prune climbing or once-blooming shrub roses.

Copies are available of "Landscaping in Ellis County" at the extension office. This spiral bound publication was compiled by Ellis County Master Gardeners, at a cost of \$10.00, to deal with diverse subjects particular to gardening in our county. Still continue to visit us on the website: www.ecmga.com or call 972-825-5175. I'm amazed at our website. Some of those award winning master gardeners have been hard at work!

Week 4 - Let's talk about the fun part of what I do...perennials and annuals... mostly flowers, but all absolute beauty.

Oh, **the Color**...the flowers...the trees... the shrubs around our homes...so what is the fly in this ointment?? You're just not sure what you want to plant. Friends, have I got a solution for you. Go to the website for Texas Smartscape provided by the North Central Texas Council of Governments. This started as a water management program for Texas cities: www.txsmartscape.com. This gives you access to a search engine to select just the right plant for your soil, water, and sun conditions. Select by height, or spread, even color... Talk about easy!!! I personally like easy...I'm looking for easy. When asked, I recommend low maintenance and low water. That's just two of the much-varied criteria that can be requested from Texas Smartscape. Here's another piece of "Deb" advice... try to buy locally grown plants that are already acclimated to our water (with its indigenous mineral and chemical content), to our soils, to the local weather conditions, etc... your plants are already on the road to thriving right here, where you are...so just ask and buy locally grown whenever possible.

For any questions, or comments, please call the Texas Cooperative Service at 972-825-5175 to speak with a Ellis County Master Gardener. They love to hear from y'all. Or visit the website www.ecmga.com. Together we can create a better city, a better Ellis County, a better Texas.