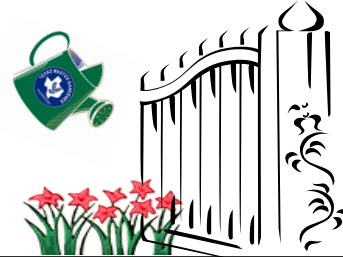




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume IX, Issue Three

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

March, 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. It will be sent around the first of every month. Best of all; it's FREE! Susan Clark, Editor

The Ellis County Master Gardeners
16th Annual Lawn & Garden Expo
Saturday, March 19, 2016 ♦ 9 a.m.--5 p.m.
Waxahachie Civic Center

Gold Sponsors



Bronze Sponsors



Green Sponsors

AmeriGrafix ♦ Boyce Feed & Grain ♦ CNB of Texas ♦ Holcim
Renewal by Andersen ♦ Roland's Nursery & Landscape
Tex-Scapes Greenery

Visit any sponsor for free tickets!
For complete details,
please visit www.ecmga.com

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



Listen to KBEC

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

The Ellis County Master Gardeners have a fifteen 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:

It's Mar, What Needs to be Done?	2
Wildflower of the Month	3
ECMGA 2016 Scholarship	3
ECMGA 2016 EXPO!	4
Expo Presenters	5
Expo Plant Sale	6
Expo Children's Workshop	7
News Release: Crabgrass	8
Jujube	9
Lighthouse for Learning	10
Landscape Gardening	11
What's Happening?	13



Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo – March 19th, 2016

The Waxahachie Civic Center will open its doors to the 16th annual Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo Saturday, March 19th. Exhibitors will pack the center with outdoor living necessities, plants, machinery, yard art and landscape project materials.

Workshops for adults and children will be taught by Master Gardeners and this year's keynote speaker, Neil Sperry. The kids will learn how to grow their own plants and make a variety of take-home projects. Adults can attend sessions on gardening topics, new techniques or ask the experts questions about specific gardening challenges.

One of the most popular attractions continues to be the Master Gardener plant sale with a large variety of plants suited for the landscapes of North Central Texas. Support the Ellis County 4-H by visiting their concession stand for lunch and snacks.

Register for the many great door prizes donated by the exhibitors. Enjoy a day at the Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo with your family. Pick up FREE tickets by visiting an Expo sponsor. A list of sponsors is available on the front page.



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

Planting

- ✿ Plant these cool-season annuals early in the month for spring color: petunias, larkspurs, foxgloves and stocks. Some warm season annuals such as marigolds, celosia and wax begonias may be planted in the last week of the month.
- ✿ Plant tomatoes, peppers and eggplants from pots after March 15th. They should be hardened off (gradually exposed to outside temperatures) before putting in the ground.
- ✿ Plant seeds of warm-season vegetables such as beans, corn, squash, melons and cucumbers in mid-to-late March. Wait until the soil warms in April to plant okra.
- ✿ Plant herbs in raised beds with soil that has been amended with organic matter. Plants should always be hardened off before planting.
- ✿ Vines (including hyacinth bean, Cypress vine, morning glories and Malabar spinach) can be planted from seeds sown directly into well-prepared soil.
- ✿ Plant perennial flowers in amended well-drained soil. In planning a perennial bed, know each plant's prime blooming season, height, width and color. Plan for a sequence of color during the year. Add mulch around new plantings.
- ✿ See the *Lawn, Garden and Landscaping Manual* (available through the ECMGA), which shows the best native and adapted perennials for Ellis County.

Fertilizing and Pruning

- ✿ Remove the dead, top growth from Bermuda grass lawns by lowering the mower one to two notches. This will allow the grass to spread faster, which will help choke out weeds. Bag the clippings and use in the compost pile or as mulch.
- ✿ Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to pecans, and again in April and May. Apply around the tree's drip line at the rate of one pound of actual nitrogen per inch of trunk diameter.
- ✿ Begin fertilizing roses with a balanced fertilizer or a specialty rose food.
- ✿ Prune spring-flowering shrubs and vines such as flowering quince, azaleas, forsythia, bridal wreath (*Spiraea*), Lady Banksia Rose, Carolina jessamine and coral honeysuckle immediately after they finish blooming.
- ✿ All trees, shrubs, vines and groundcovers can be fed with high-nitrogen fertilizer or compost. For patio pots and other container gardens, apply a diluted, water soluble high nitrogen fertilizer once a week.
- ✿ A pre-emergent may be applied on lawns to help control spring and summer broadleaf and grassy weeds if necessary. A "weed and feed" fertilizer is not recommended because it is too early to fertilize lawns.

Garden Watch

- ✿ If frost or freeze is predicted, cover early vegetable plantings and newly planted annuals with frost cloth which can make a six to eight degrees difference in temperature.
- ✿ Control black spot, powdery mildew and thrips on roses with an appropriate fungicide or systemic insecticide. Use a stream of water or an insecticidal soap on aphids.
- ✿ When a pesticide is needed, always use the least toxic one first.
- ✿ Install a drip irrigation system in your vegetable garden for increased production and maximum water efficiency.
- ✿ Inspect the lawn sprinkler system to ensure proper operation. Replace worn or broken sprinkler heads and adjust spray patterns as needed to reduce runoff.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener



Greenthread –Sunflower Family (Asteraceae)

Thelesperma filifolium (Hook.) Gray

Range: 1, 2, 4, 6–10 (Ellis County is range 4)

Size: 8–30 inches

Blooms: February through December, Perennial

There are at least eight species of *Thelesperma* in Texas. All species have opposite leaves, which are divided once, twice or sometimes thrice, into segments that are ultimately linear and threadlike. Greenthread has eight yellow, three-lobed, ray flowers around a yellow or brown disk. Occasionally there may be a diffuse brown or reddish brown color near the base of the rays, but never in a definite spot.

Indians made a tea from this plant, as well as other *Thelesperma* species, hence they all are sometimes called “Navajo tea.” Some people prefer this tea to commercial varieties. *Thelesperma* is found in dry soils, in pastures, prairies, vacant lots and on roadsides.



Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarship 2016

In 2003, ECMGA decided to make scholarships available to graduating high school seniors residing in Ellis County. We wanted to provide opportunities to these students that chose college studies in horticulture and/or life sciences disciplines. Since then, we have awarded 32 high school students with college scholarships totaling \$55,500.

One of the objectives of the ECMGA is to build partnerships with the Ellis County community to expand horticultural education and opportunities. In keeping with this objective, the ECMGA will again make scholarship funds available in 2016 to deserving high school seniors pursuing studies in horticulture-related fields.

To qualify, the applicant must be a graduating high school senior residing in Ellis County from an Ellis County High School, Ellis County Charter High School or Ellis County Home School Program. The applicant must have an elected academic major in a horticulture-related field that includes, but is not limited to horticulture, agriculture, environmental science, forestry, botany, biology (e.g., plant genetics, plant physiology), landscape design or entomology. Other horticulture-related fields of studies are outlined in the scholarship application package available on the ECMGA website. Applicants must be able to provide proof of acceptance at an accredited institution of higher education.

In addition, this year the ECMGA has decided to allow former ECMGA College Scholarship Awardees currently enrolled in horticulture programs/degree plans to also apply for a 2016 scholarship to continue their college/university studies. ECMGA college scholarships awarded to qualifying students in 2016 will be up to \$3,000. Students applying for the ECMGA Scholarship are invited to visit <http://www.ecmga.com> to download the application package found under the “What’s Happening” tab. The completed application may be submitted by registered mail (return receipt requested) or in person to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office located at 701 South I-35, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165. If additional information is needed regarding the ECMGA Scholarship, please call (972) 825-5175. All scholarship applications must be received no later than 4:00pm on March 18, 2016.

LAWN & GARDEN EXPO



MARCH 19TH 2016

9 a.m. - 5 p.m. | Waxahachie Civic Center

Over 100 Exhibit Booths • Children's Workshops • Keynote Speakers
Ask The Experts • Door Prizes • Plant Sales • 4-H Food Concessions

Admission at the door \$5
(Children under 12 free)

FREE Advance Tickets
Available From Our Sponsors

SPEAKERS:

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: NEIL SPERRY
To a More Colorful Ellis County

SPEAKER: SCHERLE BARTH
Roses, Butterflies and Tomatoes

GOLD SPONSORS:



BRONZE SPONSORS: EarthTones Greenery, Waxahachie Civic Center, Ark Country Store, H-E-B

GREEN SPONSORS: AmeriGrafix, Boyce Feed & Grain, CNB of Texas, Holcim, Renewal by Andersen, Roland's Nursery & Landscape, Tex-Scapes Greenery



972.825.5175 | WWW.ECMGA.COM



2016 EXPO Presenters

Scherle Barth, 10:00 a.m. Meeting Room C & D



Roses, Butterflies and Tomatoes; Attracting, Protecting & Cultivation

Butterflies are the primary pollinators for many plants. Learn how to attract them to your yard or garden. Roses add beauty and interest to the garden and also attract pollinators. Earth-Kind® roses are more reliably disease and drought tolerant with less work. Tips about tomatoes will include recommended varieties for this area, planting techniques and when to plant.

Scherle successfully completed Master Gardener as well as a Master Composter programs in Collin County. From 2000 to 2008 she was an active volunteer for Keep Plano Beautiful and was named volunteer of the year for that program. Teaching adults and children about the natural world of living things provided her with opportunities to get individuals involved in gardening. Texas A&M, Dallas facility, was her employer until 2008. While at A&M Scherle was involved in wild flower hybridization, Earth-Kind® rose trials and management of the community gardens.

Neil Sperry

Keynote Speaker, 1:00 p.m. Meeting Room C & D

To A More Colorful Ellis County

Neil Sperry, Texas Gardener, Author, Radio Broadcaster and gardening expert will be presenting "To A More Colorful Ellis County" This is a "must not miss" for anyone who wants to learn more or has questions about successful gardening in North Texas. After his presentation he will be available for a book and answering questions.

Neil Sperry grew up in College Station, the son of a professor and head librarian. He attended Texas A&M, but transferred to the Ohio State University where he completed both his B.S. and M.S. in horticulture.

Neil broadcasts weekends over DFW powerhouse radio station WBAP NEWS/TALK 820 AM. That follows a very successful 30 year career at KRLD Dallas/Fort Worth. His *Complete Guide to Texas Gardening* is the 4th bestselling gardening hardback in American history. In April of 2014, Neil Sperry released his latest book, *Neil Sperry's Lone Star Gardening* (Texas Complete Planting Guide and Gardening Calendar).



TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

*From your Ellis County Master Gardeners
Happy Spring!
Happy Easter!*

Expo 2016 Plant Sale

With *Monica Nyenhaus*
Ellis County Master Gardener



Each year we strive to procure plants that have lots of color as well as drought tolerance for our Texas heat. This year is no exception. Many of the plants we are growing in the greenhouse are sure to please, no matter what your taste is. The esporanza is a beautiful shrub that flowers all summer long and thrives in our heat and full sun. Its bright yellow flowers and deep vibrant green foliage is stunning in any landscape.



We have Gregg's blue mist, which is a soft lavender-blue ground-cover that will spread each year and is one of the favorite places for butterflies to hover all day long. The soft, frilly leaves that are bright green contrast with the fuzzy lavender flowers topping off this amazing plant. This year we are presenting Turks Cap, but with a twist; it has pink flowers instead of the traditional red. One of the nicest things about this plant is that it will tolerate and bloom both in the shade and in the sun.

We have a few new Texas Superstars® in our selection this year, like the Whopper begonia. It will get huge and can handle our tough summers as well. We have both bronze and green leaf varieties available. We will have our tomato plants and plenty of them along with some hot and sweet peppers, too. You can't go wrong having fresh herbs in your garden. This year, we have lemon thyme, chocolate mint and Mexican mint marigold for your culi-



nary needs.

This is just a sampling of what will be available. You can also expect plenty of roses, more than 20 varieties of perennials in all sorts of colors and beautiful hanging baskets all waiting for you to take home and nurture in your own yard.

We look forward to seeing you. Be sure to get to the sale for the best selection. Remember, all of us wearing those bright pink shirts this year are more than happy to help you make your selections and will answer as many questions as you can dish out!

See you at the EXPO Plant Sale!

Open House

The Master Gardeners will host an open house at the greenhouse on Saturday, March 12 from 9am until 12pm.

Come and tour our greenhouse. Learn about all the plants we propagate and managing the greenhouse.

There will be a small selection of plants available for sale.

The greenhouse is located at the Waxahachie High School. Enter the greenhouse from the side of the school across the street from Walmart.



You're Invited!



The Children's Workshop

By J. R. McMahan
Ellis County Master Gardener



The Children's Workshop Room has become a favorite area at the annual Ellis County Master Gardener Lawn & Garden Expo and this year is no exception. The Children's Workshop Room is moving and will be located in the Civic Center's Crape Myrtle Room for twice the space! Children and adults all enjoy the educational exhibits, hands-on activities and lively atmosphere.

The Indian Trail Master Naturalists partner with us in education and will have information and an activity. Texas Discovery Gardens will again be joining us with their exciting nature-themed displays and John Bunker Sands Wetland Center will be with us this year. Smokey Bear is a favorite guest and will return to make appearances for pictures.

Representatives from the Junior Master Gardener program will be on hand to talk with teachers and parents of homeschool students. Our insect lady will be set up with her collection and available to answer questions and talk with children about all kinds of creepy crawlies. The Children's Workshop Room is always a buzz of activity around the demonstration honey beehive and there are plans for several educational craft activities children can participate in. Master

Gardener volunteers will be available to assist children with activities and answer parent's questions about gardening with children. Plan to visit the Children's Workshop Room for a fun time and always a surprise or two!



If you are considering being a market seller and would like to learn more about the market, there will be an informational meeting Thursday, March 17 at 6 pm at Waxahachie City Hall in the council chambers. Application forms as well as market rules and guidelines will be available. Scheduling events and plans for new events will be discussed. Returning sellers are encouraged to attend. For more information, contact Anita Brown at city hall, (469)309-4111.

For more information, visit <http://www.waxahachie.com/Departments/DowntownDevelopment/DowntownFarmersMarket>

 **Spring Forward**

SUNDAY, MARCH 13TH

TURN YOUR CLOCKS AHEAD ONE HOUR



Crabgrass

Given the warm temperatures in north Texas, Dr. Matt Elmore, Extension Turfgrass Specialist, wanted to pass along information about pre-emergent weed control.

Soil temperatures have been in the upper 50s and low 60s recently and crabgrass germination may be very soon, especially since we have gotten rain. Now is a great time to apply pre-emergent herbicides.

General Information

Crabgrass germination typically occurs in late winter (February to mid-March), but varies from year to year, based on temperature, rainfall and location. Crabgrass germination usually begins when the soil temperature at a two-inch depth reaches 55°F for at least three days. Since crabgrass is the first summer annual grassy weed to germinate, we apply pre-emergence herbicides based on its germination.

The forsythia (*Forsythia* spp.) plant can be used to time pre-emergence herbicide application. Make pre-emergence applications when forsythia is in full bloom (their yellow flowers are usually among the first plants to bloom). Forsythia plants are more prevalent in East Texas; they are rare in West Texas.

Sometimes referred to as "pre" herbicides, pre-emergence herbicides must be applied before the target weed germinates or emerges, or they will not control it. Although these herbicides are commonly used to control **annual** weeds that germinate at predictable times of year, they will not control **perennial** weeds. Following are some tips for pre-emergence herbicides.

Selecting a Product

A pre-emergence herbicide is the most effective way to con-

trol crabgrass. They are especially recommended for lawns with a history of crabgrass problems.

Common active ingredients found in products available to homeowners include pendimethalin, dithiopyr and prodiamine. Trade names for these products include, but are not limited to: Pre-M, Bonide Crabgrass Preventer and Halts Crabgrass Preventer. Pre-emergence herbicides that contain these active ingredients will usually provide suitable crabgrass control when applied before crabgrass germination and according to the product label. These products mostly control grassy weeds, although they may control some broadleaf weeds. Always check to ensure that the product can be safely used on the turf grass species in your lawn.

Many pre-emergence products that contain dithiopyr are labeled for early post-emergence control of small (seedling) crabgrass plants. This includes products such as Bonide

Crabgrass and Weed Preventer. Consider using these products if you cannot make the application before germination and check the label to ensure it contains dithiopyr and is labeled for early post-emergence control.

Corn gluten meal is an organic option for crabgrass control. Research has demonstrated that crabgrass control with this product is inconsistent, but it may be effective in some situations.

It is best to select a pre-emergence product that does not contain nitrogen fertilizer. Many companies that distribute products nationally are crabgrass preventers with nitrogen. While these products may be suitable for northern regions of the U.S., they should not be used in Texas. Warm-season grasses are still mostly dormant when crabgrass germinates and nitrogen fertilizer should not be applied until the lawn is mostly green.

Unlike "Weed and Feed" products that will control broadleaf weeds and should not be applied around tree

drip lines, pre-emergence herbicides are usually safe for use around trees and ornamentals. Products that contain atrazine are one exception. Some are labeled for use over the top of ornamentals. **Always read the product label thoroughly for use restrictions.**

Pre-emergence herbicides are effective only if they are applied uniformly and are watered into the soil by rainfall or



(Continued on page 13)

Jujube—Chinese Date Tree with Edible Fruit

With Robert Shugart
Ellis County Master Gardener



Jujubes, *zizyphus jujuba*, grow and thrive in just about every county in Texas. I have one growing along my driveway. How many of you have ever heard of a Jujube tree? They are not commonly found in nurseries, but are propagated by root sprouts, seeds or by grafting. Root sprouts can be a problem if not mowed or removed. Jujubes can be identified from a distance by the nearly impenetrable thicket they often form if not maintained.

Chinese dates are among the most persistent and long-lived imported trees in the South. Some sources indicate that they were introduced from Europe by Robert Chisolm in 1837, and first planted in Beaufort, North Carolina. They have also been mentioned as being in the early Spanish missions in California, and were possibly brought to America at an earlier time.

They are thought to be native to Syria or China, and are widely distributed in the warmer parts of Europe, southern Asia, Africa and Australia. The Chinese have been known to cultivate as many as 400 varieties of jujube, and have a great fondness for the fruit. It is sometimes processed with honey and sugar and sold as a dessert confection. The jujube has been cultivated in China for hundreds of years.

Roger Meyers, a member of California Rare Fruit Growers, Inc., has published several articles on jujubes, and is attempting to research the names and provide sources for some of the best varieties that have been introduced in the past.

Jujubes can reach 50 feet tall, and have shiny, deciduous, dark green foliage and, sometimes, thorny stems. They are pruned and trained to much smaller plants at times. Flowers are small and inconspicuous, appearing in the axil of the leaf. The fruit ranges from one half to two inches long, and changes from green to reddish brown as it matures in late summer and early fall. In addition to their culinary uses, Chinese dates have traditionally been used for medicinal purposes, with the fruit being made into pastes, tablets



and syrups that were supposed to be soothing to the mucous membranes.

The earliest reference to jujubes I have found comes from research by George R. Stritkus of Montgomery, Alabama. In Volume 3, 1885, of the American Cotton Planter (a monthly magazine published in Montgomery), an editorial appeared referring to jujube being imported 'a short time back' from Europe. The Mission Valley Nurseries Catalog, Victoria County, Texas, 1888, provides an interesting entry on jujubes:

"Jujube—fruit somewhat between a plum and a date. Foliage ornamental, hardy, and vigorous here—suckers badly. We plant it for ornament and for our bees...50 cents each, \$4/ dozen."

Research on the nutritional content and culinary uses of jujube fruit, done in the Food Science section of Texas A&M's Horticultural Sciences Department in the 1940s by Dr. Homer Blackhurst, revealed that the vitamin C content was very high. Experiments where the seeds were removed and the fruit cooked with water, sugar and seasonings resulted in a product much like apple butter, and in taste tests with apple butter, it was selected as superior.

Following is one recipe taken from USDA publication B-1215 (date unknown) entitled "Methods of Utilizing the Chinese Jujube."

Jujube Butter

- 6 pints jujube pulp
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon cloves
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 5 pints sugar
- 1/4 pint vinegar
- 1 lemon

Boil fruit (in sufficient water to cover it) until tender. Rub cooked fruit through a sieve or colander to remove the skin and seeds. Cook slowly until thick, put in jars and seal while hot.



Source: Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist, Texas A&M University

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 yards for spring.

Monday March 28, 6:00pm–7:30pm. Perennials for All Seasons. Learn about perennial plants that will return winter, spring, summer and fall. We will cover soil prep, types of plants and the pros and cons to planting perennials. Slideshow presentation of perennials will be shown and live plants will be available for attendees. Instructor: Pam Davis Young. Cost: \$12.00

Monday, April 11, 6:00pm–7:30pm. Culinary Herbs for North Texas. Herbs are some of the easiest plants to grow. They will grow almost anywhere, don't like a lot of fertilizer and generally prefer minimal watering, but they reward you with an abundance of flavor year round. What more could the casual gardener want! Learn which herbs grow best in Texas, which love our hot summers and those that prefer the cooler seasons. We will discuss container gardens, harvesting tips and preserving. There will be lots to smell, sample and perhaps some plants to share. Instructor: Arlene Hamilton. Cost: \$12.00

Mondays, April 18 & April 25, 6:00pm–7:30pm. Irrigation Installation in the Home Landscape (with hands on learning). You can have a green lawn or irrigated garden without spending much money. This is a two-part class with the first session in the classroom at WHS. The second session will be at the Horticultural Learning Garden in Getzender Park where the class will assist in installing a drip irrigation system in one of the garden beds. Participants will learn about installation and maintenance of different types of sprinkler systems and what is best for your needs. Learn about the importance of a backflow valve, how to test water pressure and how to winterize the system. Instructor: Alan Paxton & Jim Derstler. Cost: \$24.00

Monday, May 2, 6:00pm–7:30pm. Good Bugs in the Garden. It's common for gardeners to go out with chemicals and try to kill all the insects. But wait!! Not all insects are bad – in fact, most have a very important place in the food chain and can be used to your advantage. When you spray, you kill the good as well as the bad. This class will help you identify some of the common good and bad insects. You will also get some non-chemical ideas on how to keep them from taking over your plantings. Bring insect samples if you want. Instructor: Susan Gilliland. Cost: \$12.00

Tuesdays, April 19–May 10 (four classes), 6:00pm–8:00pm. Beginning Farmer/Rancher. If you are a landowner or have newly acquired a farm or ranchland and are seeking information for the best way to utilize your property, join this experienced instructor for advice. You will cover topics: soils and soil fertility, soil testing, pasture management, basic livestock productions and pond management. This class will be held 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



Find us on:
facebook®

Are you a Facebooker? Ellis County Master Gardeners are on Facebook and we'd love to have you join us. 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! You'll find us at the link below, 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.

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



Landscape Gardening

From: Gail Haynes, Ellis County Master Gardener

Ellis County Master Gardeners have a website at www.ecmga.com. Check it for information on gardening in Ellis County, sign up for this 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 when you leave a message at (972) 825-5175.

How Can You Protect Tomatoes When Planting Early in the Spring?

Dr. Joe Masabni, Assistant Professor & Vegetable Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

How soon can I plant my tomatoes? That's a question on my mind every year. With the winter season towards its end and warm days more and more common, every gardener starts itching to plant the vegetable garden, primarily the king of them all, the mighty tomato.

There's a reason every gardener wishes to plant tomatoes as early as possible, and not just for the need to garden. The reason is that in most areas of Texas, tomato plants stop setting fruit by early July so we need to maximize our harvest season by first of July. So the earlier in, the earlier we can harvest before July 1st.

Tomato plants stop setting fruit by July 1st because night temperatures by then are in the mid-70s with about saturated relative humidity. Both those conditions cause the pollen grains of the tomato flower to burst, thus no pollination occurring. So, how soon can we plant tomatoes outside and what can we do to win the race game?

In Texas counties east of I-35, the average date of last spring frost is: March 1st in Ellis County, the last predicted frost date is March.

Of course, these are average frost free dates and growers are reminded to check their local county historical weather data.

With these dates in mind, the goal is to plant as close to the last spring frost date as possible. If we take the March 15th date for the Ellis County area, then we have three and a half months of time before last tomato harvest. But those months are not all harvest months; we must account for plant growth and development before the first harvest, which is

buried in the soil to hold it down. The Hotkap (www.hotkaps.com) is advertised as extending the growing season by two to four weeks. It is a single use item and the hotkaps are sold in quantities.

I have used them both in 2010 and 2011 and was pleased with their performance in terms of improved growth with Hotkaps rather than without them.



usually in late May or early-mid June. Basically, we have approximately one month of tomato harvest before July 1st.

So, how can we extend the tomato harvest? We can if we consider cultural methods to plant earlier than the last spring frost date.

Two tools available to the homeowner are hotkaps and pre-punched plastic tunnels. Hotkaps are waxed paper that goes over the small transplant with its edge

The pre-punched plastic and the wire hoops used to create a mini-tunnel and an air pocket about one to one and a half feet over the tomato plants resulted in bigger plants compared to the Hotkaps. The plastic is available online from many sources and is usually called 'low tunnels', or 'hoop supported row covers'.

The plastic can be used for multiple seasons if care is given during removal and storage.

(Continued on page 12)

Landscape Gardening (Continued from page 11)

Finally, the easiest cultural tool in my opinion, is to plant a large plant early in the season. Larger plants can tolerate cold weather and can grow much more rapidly than smaller plants when the weather warms up. The photos below show the before and after images of a large tomato plant buried horizontally except for about six inch of the tip above ground. The leaves will compost, the stems will develop many roots, and the tomato will grow into a large plant in no time.

So, if you get the desire to plant tomatoes outside in early March instead of after March 15th, make sure you get the biggest tomato plant, bury most of it horizontally, and cover it with a Hotkap or with a small plastic tunnel. With proper fertilization and a little luck, you will enjoy a bountiful harvest.



Garden Checklist for March 2015

Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist Texas AgriLife Extension Service

- ⊗ Often, tomato and pepper plants started outdoors from seed will grow so quickly they will catch up with commercial plants in size within a few weeks. For many gardeners, this is the only way to obtain rare or heirloom varieties. But because this has been a winter with erratic weather patterns, it's best to keep an eye on young tomato transplants so that they may be covered if the threat of a late frost occurs.
- ⊗ Don't be in a hurry to set out young pepper plants. Wait until the temperatures seem to be settled.
- ⊗ Pruning of evergreens and summer flowering trees and shrubs should be completed in early March. Prune spring flowering trees and shrubs as soon as they finish blooming.

- ⊗ Start hanging baskets of petunias, ferns and others for another dimension in landscape color. One attractive begonia plant can yield a number of others through careful rooting of stem cuttings.
- ⊗ Plant dahlia tubers in fertile, well-drained soil.
- ⊗ In North Texas, there is still time to plant seeds of your favorite annuals in flats to be transplanted outdoors when danger of frost is past.
- ⊗ Select and order caladium tubers as well as coleus plants for late April and early May planting. Do not plant caladiums until soil temperature reaches 70°F.
- ⊗ As camellia and azalea plants finish blooming, fertilize them with three pounds of azalea-camellia fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed area. Check mulch on azalea and camellia beds and add where needed.

- ⊗ Fertilize roses every four to six weeks from now until September.
- ⊗ Beware of close-out sales on bare-root trees and shrubs. The chance of survival is rather low on bare-root plants this late in the season. Your best bet at this time of year is to depend on container-grown or balled-and-burlapped plants for landscape use.



What's Happening in March?

Farmers Market returns Saturday, April 16!

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

Waxahachie Downtown Farmers Market News

Saturday, April 16 begins the 2016 season for the Waxahachie Downtown Farmers Market and we are anticipating a great year. Jim, Cheryl and Arlene have been planning for the market and also discussing some new ideas. The Junior Master Gardener leaders and the Master Naturalists will share offering a monthly kid's craft on the second Saturday and already have some exciting activities planned. The fourth Saturday of each month will be "A Taste of Market" with food demonstrations and samplings being offered. The Master Gardeners will offer two grill festivals that always bring large crowds to the market. We are testing being open the second Thursday of each month for Ladies Night Out and discussing how to draw more shoppers to the market at that time.

The market is seeking new sellers for the season and we encourage you to consider joining us. The market is a great place to sell fresh, locally grown vegetables, fruits, produce, eggs and plants. Other items sold include jams, jellies, salsas, preserves and homemade baked goods. Handmade crafts, crafter made jewelry, bath and beauty products and unique items are popular. If you are interested in being a seller, please contact Anita Brown at Waxahachie city hall, (469) 309-4111. An informational meeting will be held on Thursday, March 17. See page seven for details.



Indian Trail Master Naturalists Events

Join the **Indian Trail Master Naturalists** at their monthly meeting on **Monday, March 28**. 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

Mockingbird Nature Park Wildflower Walks. Members of the Indian Trail Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program will be leading Wildflower Walks on the third Saturday of each month from April through September. The walks start at 9am at the Butterfly Garden. Please join this half mile stroll along the trails. Everyone is invited to attend, and there is no charge. Bring drinking water and wear close-toed shoes. Insect repellent is a good idea, also. Walks will be canceled in the event of rain. Info at: <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/> or email: Information@itmnc.com

(Continued from page 8)

irrigation before the crabgrass or other target weed emerges. See the product label for information on the amount of irrigation or rainwater needed.

Recent or upcoming renovations and severely damaged lawns.

After they are watered in, the herbicide molecules remain in the upper layer of soil and control weeds or undesirable grass-



es that germinate from seed for several weeks. If you plan to seed or sod, do not apply a pre-emergence herbicide without first checking the label for the appropriate reseeding/sodding interval.

Also, do not apply some pre-emergence herbicides before sprigging or sodding. If you are planning this type of turf renovation, use other weed-control options. In general, apply these herbicides only to well-established turf grass. See the product label if you have established turf from sod, seed or sprigs within the previous year. Many pre-emergence herbicides will impede encroachment of existing turf grass into areas damaged by winterkill, traffic or diseases. Do not use pre-emergence herbicides if your lawn has been severely damaged.

For further information, contact Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent-Agriculture/Natural Resources, 701 South I-35 E, Waxahachie, or call (972) 825-5175 or email wmar-nold@ag.tamu.edu

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.