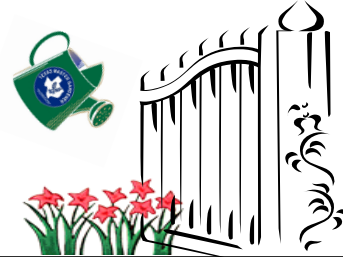




# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume XI, Issue 1

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

January, 2018

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) and click on subscribe. Best of all; it's FREE! Editors and Newsletter Team: Susan Ellis, Donna Hubbard, Bree Shaw

## 2018 Master Gardener Calendar

The Ellis County Master Gardeners are proud to present our 12<sup>th</sup> annual gardening calendar. Our theme this year is "*Landscapes of Tomorrow – Back to Basics.*"

As always, this beautiful and informative calendar includes month-by-month gardening information, soil preparation, fertilization, moon signs, average temperature and rainfall each month, holidays, as well as sponsors' events.



Your **FREE** copy is now available at all of the following calendar sponsors' locations. While you are there to pick up your calendar, please shop at their businesses. You might find just the Christmas gift you are looking for. Also thank them for sponsoring this year's gardening calendar! Without them there wouldn't be a calendar.

### The calendars are now available

#### Ellis County Master Gardeners and Sponsors

##### Waxahachie

Ann's Health Food Center

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Waxahachie Farmer's Market

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Brazos Valley Equipment

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Tex-Scapes Greenery

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Maypearl Insurance

##### Midlothian

Earthtones Greenery

Rigsby Garden Center

Silverado Lawn & Landscaping

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### Listen to KBEC

Saturday mornings at 8:10 a.m. on 1390 AM.

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

Melinda Kocian

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

### PLANTING

- \* Plant shade trees, shrubs, and woody ornamentals from nursery containers. Check out the Texas SmartScape™ program at [www.txsmartscape.com](http://www.txsmartscape.com) to help you create an environmentally friendly landscape.
- \* Transplant small trees and shrubs while they are dormant. Water the plant well before digging.
- \* Plant cold-tolerant herbs such as chives, cilantro, garlic and parsley. Onions from transplants can be planted late month.
- \* Seed for warm-weather annuals can be planted in flats in a temperature-controlled environment. Tomatoes and peppers, especially those hard to find varieties in the spring, can be started from seed mid-month. All require bright light and warm temperatures (60-70°F). Use grow lights for best results.
- \* Tulip and hyacinth bulbs, which have been chilled for eight weeks should be planted immediately.
- \* Plant blackberries, fruit, and nut trees. Cultivar or variety selection is critical. Contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Ellis County at (972) 825-5175 or visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut> for recommended varieties.

### FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

- \* Prune trees, including live oaks and red oaks, to remove dead, broken, and unwanted branches, or to raise the canopy to allow more light underneath.
- \* Keep a spray can of pruning paint handy to immediately paint any wound on your oak trees. To help prevent oak wilt, we no longer say there are windows of safety because of cold weather or hot weather. Paint every wound all year long.
- \* Water newly planted trees and shrubs as needed. Apply a liquid root stimulator monthly.
- \* Peach and plum trees should be pruned to stimulate lateral branches and keep their “bowl” shape. Thin out branches to open the center to allow more sunlight resulting in fruit production over the entire tree.
- \* Apply blood meal or a slow-release fertilizer to pansies and other cool-season annuals.
- \* Maintain free-form crape myrtles by removing “root sprouts” growing from the base, but please, NEVER cut the tops off of crape myrtles. It produces unsightly knots and delays blooming. However, removing spent seed pods is okay.

### GARDEN WATCH

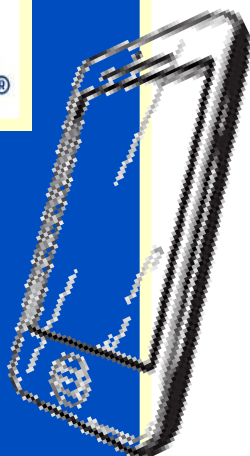
- \* Remove by hand broadleaf weeds, such as clover, dandelions, henbit, and chickweed, in lawns and beds. If necessary, spot spray turf with a broadleaf herbicide when temperatures are above 70 degrees. Be careful when using herbicides in flower beds to prevent the drift from harming desirable plants.
- \* Now is the time to have the soil tested in your lawn, vegetable, and flower gardens. Contact the local AgriLife Extension office at (972) 825-5175 for a soil sample test kit and mailing instructions. For additional information, go to <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu>.



Find us on:  
**facebook®**

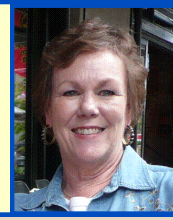
Are you a Facebooker? Ellis County Master Gardeners are on Facebook and we'd love to have you join us. Use our page as your point of contact to ask us gardening questions or get information about flowers, vegetables and herbs...we cover it all! You'll find us at the link below, and all you have to do 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>



## Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener*



**Prairie Verbena** – Verbena Family (Verbenaceae)  
*Verbena bipinnatifida* Nutt.

**Range:** 1-9 (Ellis County is Region 4)  
**Size:** 12 – 18 inches  
**Blooms:** January – December, Perennial

Usually no more than a foot high and often reclining, prairie verbena sometimes paints large areas lavender, pink, bluish or purple. Plants are hairy with square stems. Trumpet-shaped with five flattened lobes, the tiny flowers are clustered into half-globes. Opposite, stalked leaves are divided twice into finely cut foliage that adds a lacy background to the rounded flower clusters. Prairie verbena quickly covers barren areas, but is crowded out as other species invade. It is an important nectar plant for butterflies, blooming throughout the year. It often roots from reclining lower stem joints. Texas has thirty-six species of verbena, many essentially similar.



## Attention Birders

It's time to clean out and repair nesting boxes  
*Submitted by Jean Wammack*



We have been promoting nesting boxes for the songbirds. Now is the time of year to check your boxes. Clean them out; rub a dry bar of Ivory soap inside the box to discourage wasps from building nests. If a wasp should build inside the box the birds will depart even leaving eggs in the nest. If a squirrel or woodpecker has enlarged the entrance hole, place a new front on the box lining up the one and a half inch hole right over the old hole. We are trying to be better stewards by placing a predator guard under the nesting box on the steel pole. You may purchase them or make the guards from stovepipe or PVC. The guards will prevent snakes, raccoons, and squirrels from reaching the eggs or baby birds.

Can you be successful attracting song birds? If you live on acreage, you may be able to attract songbirds; wrens, titmice, chickadees, and bluebirds by adding nesting boxes. My special interest is the eastern bluebird, a shy member of the thrush family.

Nesting pairs will readily accept man-made boxes. Buy or make a box that opens from the side or front so it is easily monitored and cleaned. Boxes should be placed in an open field on a steel post about five feet above the ground and facing a tree within fifty feet. The tree will provide a perch for the young birds as they begin to fly. Boxes should be placed well away from buildings and deep shade. It is helpful if water is in the area. If possible, add a birdbath.

The male and female bluebird will build the nest and the female starts to lay eggs, generally five. She will incubate the eggs for twelve to fourteen days. After they hatch, the hatchlings are fed in the nest for two weeks. When the young birds fledge, or leave the box, clean the old nest and make sure it is dry and ant free by lifting it up and scraping out the debris that has collected in the bottom of the box. Then replace the nest. A lot of energy goes into nest building, so the birds will be happy to re-use one. Hopefully the pair will soon start a second clutch, and perhaps a third! With each clutch, the number of eggs is fewer.

The bluebird's diet is insects, especially grasshoppers! They add berries to their diet during the winter.





## Become a Texas Master Gardener



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

### What is a Master Gardener?

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

### Is the Master Gardener Program For Me?

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

Do I want to learn more about the culture and maintenance of many types of plants?

Am I eager to participate in a practical and intense training program?

Do I enjoy sharing your knowledge with people?

Do I have enough time to attend training and complete volunteer service hour requirements?

Do I have special interests that could benefit the community or an interest in developing one? (e.g., bird or butterfly knowledge, native gardens, wildflowers, etc.)

Do I have a sincere interest in nature or gardening?

### Training

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

The Master Gardener training course will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each Tuesday and Thursday throughout the month of February, 2018, at the First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Street, Waxahachie, Texas.

### Volunteer Commitment

In exchange for the training, participants are asked to volunteer at least 75 hours of service by November 30th to earn the title of "Texas Master Gardener". The volunteer time will take place during the normal work week with the exception of the Annual Lawn & Garden Expo which is held on a Saturday in the spring.

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

### Certification

Participants become certified Master Gardeners after they have completed the training course and fulfilled their volunteer commitment.

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

If you are interested in the Master Gardener Program and would like an application, please contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Ellis County at (972) 825-5175, e-mail [Ellis-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:Ellis-tx@tamu.edu) or find the application on the master gardener website, [ECMGA.com](http://ECMGA.com). Applications will be mailed upon request and must be returned no later than January 5, 2018, at which time you will be called to set up an interview.

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



## THEME GARDENS

By Linda Moxley, Master Gardener



There is an abundance of garden themes, surely one will fit your tastes.

There are **SHAPE theme gardens** – round, square, triangular, rectangular and oval gardens. Ellis County Master Gardeners have been working in Getzendaner's Star Garden for many years. Gardens can even take the shape of dogs, cats, painters' pallets and butterflies.



Of course, there are **ATTRACTANT theme gardens**. Some gardens are designed to attract butterflies, song birds, hummingbirds or bees, and others are designed NOT to attract deer and unwanted insects.

You have likely heard of "country gardens". There are **FOREIGN COUNTRY theme gardens** such as Japanese gardens with lotus plants, raked sand and oriental lanterns. French and English theme gardens are also popular. There could possibly be Russian and African gardens.

Country Gardens could also be **WILDFLOWER theme gardens** comprised of plants that originally grew in Texas rural areas – plants like Bluebonnets, Indian Blankets and Indian Paintbrush.

Some theme gardens are **PLANT-SPECIFIC** like iris, rose, and sunflower gardens. There are also **PLANT-GENERAL theme gardens**. Vegetable, succulent, herb and annual and perennial gardens could fall within this rubric.



Gardeners who design **CHILDREN'S GARDENS** like to include lamb's ears and clameyweed for touching; mint and garlic for tasting and smelling. After all, the word kindergarten is German for "children's garden". A swing or a game of "tick-tack-toe" could be incorporated into a children's theme garden.

Garden themes may relate to their **HOUSE PROXIMITY**. Folks never

talk about "house-proximity" gardens but there are dooryard, window, patio, and even kitchen gardens. Our ancestors used to look for the hollyhocks when they needed to use the outhouse.

**COLOR** forms the focus for many gardens. There are patriotic red, white, and blue gardens, collegiate-proud gardens, using only the colors of your favorite team, and gardens of all one color. An all-white garden is frequently called a moon garden because it seemingly reflects the moon.



**STRUCTURAL or HARDSCAPE theme gardens** take shape as a result of the pergola, gazebo, pedestal, fountain, or bird bath the plants surround. The plants are as diverse as the focal structures.

The varieties of theme gardens are so plentiful. If you have three similar items in a garden or if there is something common to all of the plants in an area, you have a theme garden. Label it! As you water your gardens, think about what is the commonality in each unique area. Ah, there are a bunch of pots in this area. You have a **CONTAINER GARDEN**. There is a garden in the valley with a sitting area. That is your **VALLEY GARDEN**. The plantings where you buried your pet bird are now the **CEMETERY GARDEN**.

Once you have named your theme gardens, you will more regularly tend to their needs. It is just like having a herd of goats or cows. If you name them, you won't be able to sell them. They are part of the family. Likewise, your theme gardens will receive tender care once you call them by name and make them a part of your family.



## Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarship 2018

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 36 high school students with college scholarships totaling over \$66,000.

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 2018 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, last year the ECMGA decided to allow former ECMGA College Scholarship Awardees currently enrolled in horticulture programs/degree plans to also apply for the scholarship to continue their college/university studies. ECMGA college scholarships awarded to qualifying students in 2018 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 14, 2018.**

## 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)

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

**Monday, February 26, 6pm–7:30pm, Plant Propagation.** Want to learn how to propagate plants from some of your favorites or some of your friends? This class will give you information on growing from seeds as well as different methods of propagation such as layering, cuttings, and plant division. You will have both classroom and hands on activities. Instructors: Gay Doyle and Walt Friis. Cost: \$14.00

**Thursday March 1, 6pm–7:30pm, Butterfly Gardens with Native Plants.** This class will give instruction on taking out the grass and replacing with pollinator plants or adding the right type of plants to existing gardens. Plants that will draw in our native butterflies and hummingbirds. The garden will be vibrant and full of life for your enjoyment. Some of these plants only need trimming once or twice a year-much less work than mowing every week. Perennials and annual plants can be used with great success. Instructor: Carolyn Ross Cost: \$14.00

**Monday, March 5, 6pm–7:30pm, Turf Grass Introduction.** This class will teach how to get a perfect yard. You will learn about the varieties of grasses that are good for this area of Texas. How to select the correct grass, where to purchase, and when is the best time to plant, and finally, how to prepare the soil before planting. Instructor: Scherle Barth. Cost: \$14.00

**Thursday, March 8, 6pm–7:30pm, Native Plant Landscapes.** Most gardeners recognize Bluebonnets and Indian Paintbrush as native plants but are not aware of the shrubs, vines, trees, and other plants that are native to our area and can be added to our landscapes. This class will introduce you to some of these plants and the reasons for including them on your property. Instructor: Maureen Nitkowski Cost: \$14.00

**Thursday, March 22, 6pm–7:30pm, Herbs for All Gardeners.** An introduction to growing and using herbs in our daily lives. This class will cover how to plan and start an Herb Garden for your specific needs in the garden or container. You will learn how to preserve your herbs and enjoy their flavor all summer long. The instructor will bring plants for you to see, enjoy flavors and aromas! Instructor: Bea Rocha. Cost: \$14.00

**Monday March 26, 6pm–7:30pm, Ollas, A New Way of Conserving Water in the Garden.** This class will go over the benefits of using ollas, and how to make your own olla for use in your garden. The process of making an olla will be demonstrated, and directions for making one will be handed out to the participants of the class. Ollas may be the most efficient method of local plant irrigation in dry lands known, due to the micro porous (unglazed) walls that do not allow water to flow freely from the pot, but guides water seepage to the plants. Instructor: Jane Sloan. Cost: \$14.00

**Monday, April 2, 6pm–7:30pm, Irrigation Systems Design and Efficiency.** This class will provide the basics of designing an efficient irrigation system, and provide you the knowledge to install a system yourself, or the tools to ask the smart questions of a contractor. Information will be provided to help you maintain an existing system; simple test procedures to determine if any adjustments or replacements are required to keep you from pouring your money down the drain. Instructor: Allan Paxton. Cost: \$14.00

**Thursday, April 5, 6pm–7:30pm, Rainwater Harvesting.** Harvesting rainwater is one of the many possible steps a homeowner can take to help stem water shortages and be economical. This class will provide you with information on active and passive systems. Learn how to get started with a simple rain barrel for your landscape or install a complete potable water system in your home. Instructor: Jim Derstler Cost: \$14.00

**Monday, April 9, 6pm–7:30pm, Turf Grass/Lawn Maintenance.** Is your lawn overgrown with weeds or have brown spots that is supposed to be green, or do you just want to know how to better take care of it? This class is for you. This class will provide information on grass diseases, weed control, and how to maintain your lawn for the growing season. Instructor: Mike Peters. Cost: \$14.00

**Tuesdays April 24–May 15, 6pm–8pm, (four classes) Beginning Farmer/Rancher.** If you are a land owner 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. Topics covered: 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 AgriLife Extension Office at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3, in Waxahachie. Instructor: Mark Arnold, County Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources Cost: \$22.00

**Thursday, May 3, 6pm–7:30pm, Landscape Design in Ellis County.** Learn the secrets to successful landscaping in Ellis County. Subjects covered will be soil, climate/temperature, rainfall, native and adapted plants, trees, shrubs, perennials, etc. Class includes a PowerPoint presentation with photos, and examples of designs and landscapes in Waxahachie and Midlothian. Class is taught by the "Landscape Director" for the state of Texas on the board of TNLA (Texas Nursery and Landscape Association) and Ellis County Master Gardener. Instructor: Scott Rigsby. Cost: \$14.00





## Gardening Alternatives

By: Jackie Wilhite

Winter months are the perfect time to consider new gardening methods especially if your landscaping needs have changed. Conventional gardening methods have a timeline that must be followed to obtain optimum results. Such components as first frost date and last frost date become very important. No one wants to put a lot of work into a new garden or landscape addition only to see a late frost destroy the plants. Careful planning will make implementation a lot more fun.

Gardeners are typically pouring over seed catalogs as soon as they arrive in early January, selecting familiar tried and proven varieties as well as a few new or fun ones. Sunny days would be spent working organic material into the new beds to create that just right mix and waiting for the seeds or plants to arrive. The last frost date for our area is usually around March 13. This means that unless winter hangs around longer than usual, we can safely put those plants in the ground after this date. There would be less chance of losing them to a late frost.

To extend the growing seasons, we have incorporated growing in raised beds, containers, window boxes, and mini greenhouses. These methods allow us more freedom to plant smaller areas in a quicker time frame. Selecting the best growing method depends on the plants and the end result desired. Take herbs for instance, we can grow herbs seasonally in a conventional garden with little maintenance. But if more of a certain herb is needed year round, then an alternate growing method is needed. It can be grown in a raised bed with full sun and row cover for

frigid nights, in a mini green house with controlled atmosphere, or in a container on the window sill for easy access. All methods work adequately. The choice is merely a gardener's preference.

One method that has resurfaced is gardening by the square inch. This sounds like something that only an apartment dweller would consider. But, the truth about this method is that it merely makes the most out of every square inch of space that you have to work with. It is taking the raised bed method, cutting the space into sections, and using plants that complement one another which results in a garden space that grows a lot of produce in a small space.

Plants that complement each other is also a good basis for planting in containers or buckets. This is an especially good project for children or groups of kids. Master Gardeners have taught classrooms of children how to grow a pizza garden and butterfly gardens using the bucket method. Leafy green plants such as spinach, kale, cilantro, or Swiss chard can also be grown in containers using a high nitrogen organic soil mix. This is most useful when the temperatures are dropping and the container is light enough to take indoors until temperatures climb again.

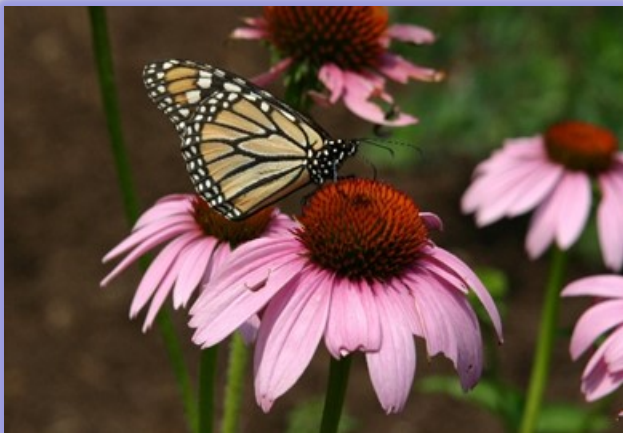
Methods are as varied as gardeners. There is one for every plant and one for every season.



**Think Spring!**  
Think Lawn & Garden



## Announcing the Amateur Photo Contest Sponsored by the Ellis County Master Gardener Association



Winners will be announced at the Lawn & Garden Expo  
March 24, 2018

Two Categories: "Single Specimen" and "In the Garden"

Photos must be submitted by midnight March 10, 2018

Photo Contest Rules with link to entry form

<https://txmg.org/ellis/photo-contest/photo-contest-rules/>

Photo Submission Form

<https://txmg.org/ellis/photo-contest/>

## GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR JANUARY 2018

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

Continue to water and fertilize cool-weather annuals such as snapdragons, Bells of Ireland, Stocks, larkspur, pansies, violas and sweet alyssum to encourage the best blooms. Now is an excellent time to transplant mature or established trees and shrubs while they are dormant.

Make flower and vegetable garden plans now before the rush of spring planting. Time spent in armchair gardening before the fireplace will pay off in improved plant selection. Besides, it is fun to page through the garden catalogs and books while contemplating changes in your garden.

Sow seeds in flats or containers to get a jump on plant growth before hot weather arrives. Petunias, begonias, and impatiens should be sown in January or February. Warm temperature plants, such as tomatoes, peppers, marigolds, and periwinkles, should be sown in late January or early February.

Apply slow release fertilizer to pansies and other cool season annuals. Distribute 5 pounds of cotton seed or alfalfa meal per 100 square feet of bed area or use commercial slow release fertilizer products according to label instructions.

Prepare beds and garden area for spring planting. Till in several inches of compost, composted pine bark or similar material.

Select and order gladiolus corms for February/March planting. Plant at two-week intervals to prolong flowering period.

Check junipers and other narrow-leaf evergreens for bagworm pouches. The insect eggs over winter in the pouch, and start the cycle again by emerging in the spring to begin feeding on the foliage. Hand removal and burning of the pouches reduce future damage.

The life of poinsettias and other Holiday Season plants can be prolonged with proper care. Keep the soil moist, but provide drainage so that excess moisture can flow from the pot. Keep the plant out of range of heating ducts and away from heating units. Keep in a cool room at night, preferably at 60 to 65 degrees F.



*Johnson's Amaryllis (A. johnsonii)*

Now is an excellent time to transplant mature or established trees and shrubs while they are dormant.

Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly the first year.

When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially when dealing with bare-root plants. The medium to small sizes (4 to 6 feet) are usually faster to become established and more effective in the landscape than the large sizes.

Hold off on pruning bush roses until February or early March. Use good shears that will make clean cuts. Remove dead, dying, and weak canes. Leave 4 to 8 healthy canes, and remove approximately one-half of the top growth and height of the plant.

Now is an excellent time to select and plant container-grown roses to fill in those bare spots in your rose garden.

When pruning shrubs, first prune out any dead or damaged branches; then thin out by removing about one-third of the canes or stems at ground level, removing the oldest canes only; and last, shape the rest of the plant, keeping in mind the natural shape of the plant. Water foliage plants as well as other containerized plants only when needed and not by the calendar.

Climbing roses should be trained but not pruned at this time. It is always appropriate to remove dead or weak canes. Weave long canes through openings in trellises or arbors and tie them with jute twine or plastic or other plant ties. Securing canes now prevents damage from winter/spring winds, and contributes toward a more refined look to the garden when roses are blooming. Wait until after the spring flowering period to prune climbing or once-blooming shrub roses.

Now is the ideal time to select and plant grapes, fruit trees and berries. Contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension agent for localized variety recommendations. Prune peaches and grapes at this time.

Herbaceous perennials and hardy ornamental grasses may be cut back at this time. It may be difficult to assess the extent of freeze damage on citrus and semi-tropical plants until warm weather arrives. When new growth begins damaged material can be removed.



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# Eclectic Gardening

With Jane Slone, Ellis County Master Gardener

## VEGETABLE GARDENING 101



Winter is about over and it is time to think about a vegetable garden. For those who have not had a vegetable garden before it is daunting to make decisions on how to begin the process. So this article is going to be titled Vegetable Gardening 10. This is the basics. As you garden, there will be a whole world of questions you may ask. This is for the beginners.

### Questions to Ask: Where? How? What?

#### WHERE Do I Start?

**Answer: SOIL** Most new gardeners never think about the quality of their soil. Every gardener should have the soil tested before they begin planting. The results will tell you what nutrients need to be adjusted, or if the soil is healthy and ready to plant. Amendments to the soil, if needed, will produce a healthy crop.



The Texas AgriLife Department can offer a soil test kit. You take samples, send it off, and the results will provide you with information about the area tested. The sample will cost a few dollars but it can save you money. If you plant your garden, and the soil is deficient, the crops will not be abundant and may not grow at all. Every few years it is recommended to find out what nutrients or lack of nutrients are in your garden.

#### HOW Do I Start?

Once you have the results, you can plan your vegetable garden. If amendments are needed, now is the time to add them to the soil. So instead of dirt you have soil. It is best to try a small area the first time to decide if vegetables will grow. You can adjust for water, sun, and wind if you start with one bed.

**Raised or In Ground?** You need to decide if you want raised beds. There are advantages to the raised beds. Bending over and planting may be hard on your body; use raised beds to give you an advantage.

Raised beds do not need to be deep. Most vegetables will grow in 6 to 12 inches of soil. The deeper the roots the more protected they are from the elements. Using raised beds will help with soil choices. Some areas in Ellis County are rock based, others are old farmland. It is important to use the correct type of soil in a raised bed. Another issue resolved by using raised beds is drainage. A water-logged area will not allow roots to breathe.



**Location...** The amount of sunlight will vary with the type of plants you choose. Is there a water source close to the bed? This can be important in the vegetable garden. A drip system is recommended. If possible a rain barrel or source for water without chemicals is a good choice.

**Organic...** The use of chemicals is not good for you and your family. Organic gardening is not only good for you but also the environment.

Insects are also important pollinators and we do not want to remove the beneficial pollinators from the garden. Insecticides will destroy the good insects that are important for pollination, as well as the pests.

**Fertilizer...** If you start with good soil, you may not need to add fertilizer. Normally fertilizer should be added when you first plant, and again after the plants begin to produce. Homemade fertilizer is the best choice. Composting is a good source of nutrients for the garden.

**Mulch...** Once planted, mulch protects the roots from the sun and heat that dries out the soil. Depending on the weather and your location, the amount and type of mulch may vary. It is recommended to allow the stems to be free of mulch so that the stem can receive air. Do not over mulch.

#### WHAT Do I Plant?

This will be a decision based on what you like. Another decision to consider, will it grow in Texas? Just because you enjoy a fruit or vegetable does not mean that it will grow in Ellis County. It is important to research the vegetables that you want to include in your garden.

Answer the questions below before you choose seeds or plants.

What variety grows well in this area?

Is it a cool weather crop? Or a hot summer crop?

How long does it take from seed to maturity?



(Continued on page 10)



## Featured Recipe of the Month

### Simple Maple Glazed Pecans

*From: Just a Little Bit of Bacon (Pinterest)*



#### Ingredients

1 cup chopped pecans  
1 1/2 tbsp salted butter  
2 tbsp maple syrup

#### Instructions

Preheat oven to 350F.

Spread out the pecans on a baking sheet and bake the pecans for 5 minutes, or until lightly toasted.

Melt the butter in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the pecans and cook, stirring occasionally for 2-3 minutes, or until the butter is mostly absorbed. Then add the maple syrup and cook, stirring frequently, until the syrup is absorbed into the nuts, another 2-3 minutes.

Lightly coat the baking sheet with a little oil. Turn out the pecans onto the baking sheet, breaking up any clumps. Allow the nuts to cool to room temperature. Use immediately or transfer to a sealed container and store for 2-3 weeks.

#### Recipe Notes

If you want these pecans as a snack rather than a salad topping, skip the chopping step and leave them whole. You can use unsalted butter instead of the salted butter. Just add a pinch or two of kosher salt in when you are melting the butter. For a thicker coating, add one more tablespoon of maple syrup (for 3 tbsp total). The nuts will be a little sticky and have a more intense maple flavor.

#### Eclectic Gardening (Continued from page 9)

Should I start with a pre-grown plant rather than seeds?  
What type of disease or insects will prevent the plant from producing fruit?

As you become a seasoned gardener you should consider keeping a journal. This will provide information about what did well, and what did not, and why. This will allow you to make a more informed decision the next time your plant. If you buy plants from a nursery, get to know the people and have them help you make choices that are good for your area. The Texas AgriLife extension office is a good source as well. It is disappointing to start and fail, but we learn from our mistakes. Next year you will know what worked and what didn't work and this will make you a better, more informed Vegetable Gardener.

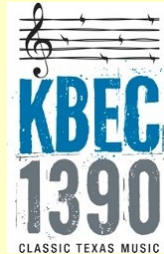
You can always mix flowers and vegetables.  
It is an invite for the pollinators that are so important to the garden.



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