

Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



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

February, 2020

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

20th Annual Ellis County Master Gardeners EXPO

Save the Date

*Saturday
March 28, 2020*

*"EDIBLE LANDSCAPING
A Delicious CONCEPT"*



Listen to KBEC

Saturday mornings at 8:10am on 1390 AM or 99.1 FM.

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!

Scotty Rigsby

Ellis County Master Gardener Monthly Meeting—You are invited! Second Tuesday of the month



Rebecca Morrow, Kaufman County Master Gardener, will be speaking at our monthly meeting on Tuesday, February 11, 2020. The topic for the meeting is "Edible Landscape". Rebecca has been a Master Gardener since 2010, and her particular interest is in education, especially in the areas of entomology, native plants and invasive species. She has a Master's Degree in Instructional Design from UT Southwestern and in Biology from Texas Woman's University. Since her retirement, Rebecca has devoted volunteer hours

to the Master Gardener program developing and making presentations for the Speakers Bureau as well as helping other speakers with their presentations.

Social time begins at 9:30am with our meeting following at 10am. The guest speaker presents at 11am. Please be our guest! The meeting takes place in the Fidelis "Banquet" Hall of the First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie. For info, call (972) 825-5175.

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IT'S FEBRUARY.... What Needs To Be Done?

Planting

♥ Cool-season vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale and potatoes should be planted mid-month, or about four weeks prior to the average last freeze date (March 15 in Ellis County). Beets, carrots, lettuce, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard and "greens" (collard, mustard and turnip) should be planted two to four weeks prior to the average last freeze.

♥ Plant asparagus crowns in 10-12 inches of soil. When buying crowns, look for two-year-old root systems with healthy roots.

♥ When buying plants, biggest is not always best, especially with bare-root plants. Small to medium sizes establish faster.

♥ Dig and divide warm season perennials (cannas, coneflowers, perennial salvia, mums) before they break dormancy.



Fertilizing and Pruning

♥ Prune bush roses around Valentine's Day. Prune old, dead and weak canes back to the ground. Leave four to eight vigorous canes, removing one-half of their growth above an outward facing bud. Wait to prune climbing or leaning roses until after they bloom. Prune errant canes any time to maintain shape.

♥ Herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses may be cut back now. Prune autumn sage (*Salvia Greggii*) by 50%. Mexican heather grass does not require pruning.

♥ Dig and divide large clumps of ornamental grasses, especially if the center of the plant has died.

♥ Cut or mow liriope before new growth emerges. Trim Asian jasmine back to four or five inches.

Garden Watch

♥ Begin controlling insects and diseases on fruit and nut trees. Spraying is essential for a successful harvest. Contact the Texas A&M AgrLife Extension Service – Ellis County for a copy of "Homeowners Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule".

♥ Look for aphids and caterpillars on vegetables, and control with insecticidal soap and Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), respectively.

♥ Check for scale insects adhering to the trunk, branches and leaves of hollies, euonymus, shade trees, fruit and pecan trees. Apply horticultural oil to control these and other over-wintering insects.

♥ For the more difficult-to-control crape myrtle bark scale, apply a neonicotinoid insecticide, such as imidacloprid, as a soil drench to the root zone of infested trees.



Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarship 2020

In 2003, Ellis County Master Gardener Association (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 43 graduating high school students with college scholarships totaling \$86,600.

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 2020 to deserving high school seniors pursuing studies in horticulture/life sciences – related fields. To qualify, the applicant must be a 2020 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/life sciences – 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/life sciences – related fields of studies are delineated 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/life sciences degree plans to also apply for an ECMGA 2020 College Scholarship to continue their college/university studies.

ECMGA college scholarships awarded to qualifying students in 2020 will be up to \$3,000. Students applying for the ECMGA College 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 (Ellis County AgriLife Extension Office) or George Cole, Chairman, ECMGA 2020 College Scholarship Program at 972/937-2440 or <mailto:georgedciii@att.net>.

All scholarship applications must be received no later than 4:00pm on March 16, 2020

NATIVE and ADAPTED PLANTS for NORTH TEXAS and ELLIS COUNTY

By Scotty Rigsby, TCLP

Successful gardening in Ellis County requires a few things that are already here and also some things that we can add to improve the outcome of the investment you are going to make in your home landscape. Two of the most important things we can easily improve on are our soil and the plants we use. In this article, we are going to focus on plants...plants that are native to our area and grow naturally here and plants that are adapted or brought into our area that work just as well. Native and adapted plants result in landscapes that are typically:



- ✕ Drought tolerant
- ✕ Heat tolerant
- ✕ Need little or no amendments to the soil
- ✕ Need less maintenance and fertilizing
- ✕ Naturally pest resistant (especially natives)
- ✕ Have a wildlife value (especially native)
- ✕ Have a higher survivability rate

There are varied perspectives about how to define a native plant species. The Federal Native Plant Conservation Committee offers the following widely accepted definition: "A native plant species is one that occurs naturally in a particular region, ecosystem and/or habitat without direct or indirect human actions." Adapted plants are those that were not originally part of the natural ecosystem but have evolved to a point where the physical conditions such as soil, climate and geology are conducive for healthy growth. Invasive plants are species characterized by quick and aggressive growth, often displacing native plants. They create a source of unhealthy competition for local plant species.

Native plants are hardy, having evolved in our harsh, extreme and unpredictable climate, battling temperature extremes such as those in 1980 of a low of minus 8° F and a high of 113° F. They thrive on the soils that occur here and on the specific nutrients those soils provide or don't provide. They also have evolved to accept the amount of rainfall we get and how we get it...sporadic, sometimes so fast and heavy that it results in flash flooding. The last ten years have provided some real extremes in drought conditions as well as record rainfall totals. Native plants also tend to be more resistant to native insects and diseases common to North Texas.

Adapted plants are also hardy but have been introduced to Texas landscapes through the horticulture industry. Most often they originate from areas with similar soil types, climates and/or hardiness zones. They could have been trial tested here by various University Research Centers or Arboretums and Botanical Gardens to prove they can be introduced and grown here with minimal requirements or assistance.

Landscaping with plants that are native and adapted to your geographic region while avoiding invasive species helps to nurture a diverse and healthy ecosystem, can save time and cost on maintenance once established. A diverse native habitat is resilient to disease and reduces the need for synthetic pesticides. It also benefits native wildlife and insects that count on the plants they have come to need in their diet. Landscaping with native plants is an alternative to the time-consuming, energy-intensive and water-inefficient practices of lawn and turf care. Remember to follow the rule of "thirds" which is 1/3 of your property in turf, 1/3 in landscaping and 1/3 in hardscape material.



Texas SmartScape is the landscape program that promotes the use of plants suited to the regions soil, climate and precipitation. The goal is to improve water quality by reducing run off and conserve local water supplies by selecting ecologically appropriate native or adapted plants that require less water, pesticides and fertilizers. If you go to www.txsmartscape.com and click on the 'Search Plant Database or Plant Search' icon, you can see select parameters showing you a list that focuses on perennials. Offering variety and diversity, blooming cycles for seven to eight months of the year as well as blooms rich in color, texture and shape.

Dwarf Palmetto - pictured top left Oak Leaf Hydrangea - pictured right



Happy
Valentine's Day

February 14





Featured Recipe of the Month

Pickled Beets

By Melinda Kocian, ECMG

Beets are a dual-purpose vegetable grown for their tender, young top growth and, later, for its fleshy roots. They must have loose and well-drained soil to develop good roots. Spring planting should be February 10 – March 1 and fall planting is September 1 – 15.

Harvest greens before they reach six inches tall and roots when the bulbs are two inches in diameter. Do not allow roots to become large and tough. Beets are great for roasting, canning or pickling. Recommended varieties: Detroit Park Red and Pacemaker III.

Ingredients

4 lbs beets (1½ - 3 inches in diameter)
 3 cups thinly sliced onions
 2½ cups apple cider vinegar
 1½ cups water
 1 tsp pickling salt
 2 cups sugar
 1 tsp whole allspice
 ½ - ¾ tsp whole cloves
 3 sticks cinnamon, broken in half
 1 T mustard seeds



Wash beets. Leave 2-inches of stem and tap root. Cover with boiling water. Cook until al dente tender (25-30 minutes).

Peel, trim ends and cut into 1-inch pieces; place in a bowl.

Combine cinnamon and seeds in cheese cloth; secure top with a string. Combine remaining ingredients in a large pan. Bring to boil; add spices. Reduce heat; simmer 5 minutes. Add beets and onion - cook until hot through. Remove cheese cloth bag.

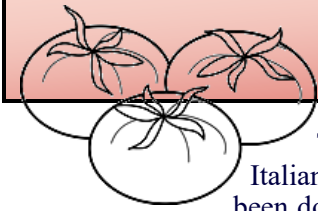
Pack beets into hot, scalded jars. Ladle pickling liquid over beets, leaving ½-inch headspace. Put on lids. Lower into boiling water. Bring to a boil; process for 30 minutes.

Indian Trail Master Naturalists Events



Join the Indian Trail Master Naturalists at their monthly meeting on Monday, February 24, 2020. The program for the evening is entitled “**Western Navarro County Bobwhite Restoration Initiative**”. Jay Whiteside, TPWS Technical Guidance Biologist, will discuss the challenge wildlife conservationists are facing maintaining landscape level wildlife habitat integrity into the future by applying beneficial management practices on smaller and smaller tracts of land. Texas contains more than 141 million acres of private “working lands” which seems very large, but with the continued increase of the state’s population and expansion of urban areas, these lands have become divided into smaller and smaller units. In addition, approximately 2.2 million acres of “working lands” were lost and converted to non-agricultural uses between 1997 and 2017. During this same period, Texas gained roughly 1000 new working farms annually, totaling over 240,000 new ownerships. With this dramatic increase in the numbers of new ownerships across the state, the average ownership size has decreased from 581 acres in 1997 to 509 acres in 2017. This decreasing trend in average ownership size is expected to continue as our population continues to grow.

The program is free and follows the 6pm 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.



HUG YOUR LOCAL AZTEC!

Robert Erickson, Henderson County Master Gardener

The next time you eat a tasty pizza or enjoy a pasta with Bolognese sauce and want to thank the nearest Italian for their wonderful food traditions, you might want to seek out your nearest Aztec first. Tomatoes have been domesticated since around 700AD, but the Italians didn't get to taste a tomato until the 1500's. After you hug your local Aztec, then you can hug an Italian and thank him for making the tomato one of the world's most favorite vegetable...or is it a fruit?

The tomato evolved in South and Central America as a small, berry-like thing growing in the wild. Various cultures cultivated it including the Aztecs. It is reported that Hernando Cortes' discovered this minimal plant in Montezuma's garden and brought some of the seeds back to Spain in 1519. The first plants grown were reported to have small cherry-sized fruits that were most likely yellow. One of the things that history often overlooks is that besides the gold the early Europeans brought back from the newly discovered lands, they also brought a number of new and exciting food plants back with them. These included tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, tobacco and a number of bean plants. In the long run, these may have been more important than the gold.

In Spain the first tomatoes were planted as ornamental plants but were not eaten. It was the Italians who took the plant and its fruit to their hearts and their mouths. Although it was grown and developed in several areas of Italy, it was the poorer Italians who began the use of tomatoes in the kitchen. The nobility tended to look down on the new plant and used them primarily as an export product.

Throughout the rest of Europe the tomato was looked upon as a poisonous plant and people were told not to eat them. The attitude carried over to the United States when the plant was re-introduced over here by the colonists and settlers who brought the seeds with them. They were primarily used as interesting garden ornamentals. In all probability, the farmers who grew them also ate the fruit and as Italian immigrants moved here, they brought their love of tomatoes with them. That love spread slowly, however.

The history of the tomato in this country changed radically during the 1800's driven by a new invention and two individuals. The invention was the development of canning. With its high acid content, the tomato was one of the easiest and longest lasting canned goods, especially during and after the Civil War. The poisonous label began disappearing as more people got their first taste of tomatoes from a can.

The first American to move the tomato forward was Alexander Livingston. Fascinated about the controversial plant, he began developing new hybrids. His groundbreaking one was introduced in 1870 and was named the Paragon. It was the first plant that could be planted and would grow consistently sized fruits. The Livingston Seed Company's Paragon is still in existence and is recognized as one of our first heirloom tomatoes. Undoubtedly, some of the Italian hybrids are older than the Paragon but they were still generally unknown until the great waves of Italian immigrants arrived later in the century.

The other man who played a major role in the advancement of the tomato was Joseph Campbell who introduced Campbell's Tomato Soup in 1897. His wasn't the first recipe but he was the one who put it on tables across the county while he built the business that still carries his name.

These developments, plus the growing interest in the foods brought by Italian immigrants, insured the tomato a place in the American kitchen and as vegetable on our plates; or is it really a fruit? The simple story is that an importer wanted to import tomatoes as a fruit because America had a tax on imported vegetables. Botanically, a tomato is a fruit. The case went to the Supreme Court in the 1890's who, in their infinite wisdom, declared the tomato a vegetable because most people ate it like a vegetable rather than like a fruit. Thus, our love affair with the tomato means that we get both a daily dose of vegetables and fruits from one source, plus the government got the tax revenue from imported tomatoes. Isn't reality wonderful?

For tomato lovers, give a hug first to your local Aztec and then an Italian. After that, send a thank you note to the Livingston Seed Company while you are enjoying a bowl of Campbell's tomato soup for lunch. That makes the circle just about complete.

Ellis County's Junior Master Gardener Program has served several elementary schools and has a group specifically for those home schooled in the county. The Ellis County JMG curriculum engages children in "hands-on" group and individual learning experiences that promote a love of gardening and helps to develop an appreciation for the environment. For information, go to: <http://jmgkids.us>

Featured plant ~ from 2020 calendar

Coral Honeysuckle is known as Evergreen Honeysuckle, Trumpet Honeysuckle or Red Honeysuckle. It is a smooth, twinning evergreen vine bearing dark shiny green leaves which are white on the lower surface. The tubular or trumpet shaped flowers occur in whorls of four to six blossoms. They are usually red outside and orange inside, or rarely all orange or yellow. Ornamentally, coral honeysuckle is well suited to climb on a fence or trellis. It is an evergreen in most of Texas and blooms sporadically throughout the growing season to attract pollinating hummingbirds.



Light House for Learning

(With the Ellis County Master Gardeners)

For reservations, contact Melissa Cobb at (972) 923-4631 or mcobb@wisd.org

Register online at https://www.wisd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1080753&type=d&pREC_ID=1369108

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 30 ~ Decorating your Front Entrance with a Beautiful Spring Garden in Containers Instructor will assist you in putting your container or containers together; will instruct, demonstrate and answer questions. Come and have fun creating a fresh spring “curb appeal” to your home. Soil and plants will be provided. (If desired, you may bring plants you prefer to use.) Must bring your own pots.

Instructor: Mattie Thompson

Thursday, April 2 ~ Texas Superstars Learn a brief history of how plants have been named Texas Superstars and how they were found. Highlights of these superstars include annuals, perennials, fruits, trees and many more. *Instructor: Gayle Johnston*

Monday, April 6 ~ Turf Grass/Lawn Maintenance Is your lawn overgrown with weeds, brown spots that should be green, or do you just want to know how to better take care of it? If so, this class is for you. You will be provided with information on grass diseases, weed control and how to maintain your lawn for the growing season. *Instructor: Mike Peters*

Thursday, April 9 ~ Vegetable Gardening in the Garden and in Containers Come learn many ways to grow vegetables. This class will teach you how to grow vegetables in raised beds, square foot gardens and containers. Our Ellis county soils require special techniques for successful spring and fall gardens. Gain a wealth of knowledge to grow your own vegetables for your family. We're here to help! *Instructor: Joan Brammer*

Monday, April 13 ~ Hobby Greenhouse Management Greenhouse growing is easy and fun! This class will cover the basics to get you started. Learn about site preparation, types of greenhouses, materials, growing, temperature control, common pests and solutions. *Instructor: Walt Friis*

Thursday, April 16 ~ How to Cut your Water Bill in Half If you have a home irrigation system, chances are you could be wasting over 50% of your water usage due to an inefficient system. Learn the basics of designing and efficient irrigation system. Gain the knowledge to install a system yourself or have the tools to ask the smart questions of an irrigation contractor. Information will be provided to help you maintain an existing system as well as test procedures to determine if any adjustments are required to keep your system in top condition. No matter if you intend to install a new system, maintain an existing system or just want to know more about one of the most ignored systems in the home, this class is for you. *Instructor: Jim Derstler*

Monday, April 20 ~ Plant Propagation Want to learn how to propagate plants from some of your favorites or some of your friends' plants? 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. *Instructor: Walt Friis*

Thursday, April 23 ~ Growing Texas Tough Plants The purpose of this class is to help the person who has a black thumb to begin to have a green thumb by teaching you that there are some beautiful plants that are hard to kill. With a little bit of knowledge those plants can become a beautiful addition to your Ellis County landscape. Many of them require less of our most valuable resource, water, and some are also more resistant to pests and diseases. *Instructor: Susan Knapp*

Monday, April 27 ~ Texas Trees - Tree Planting and Care For relaxation, food, protection and monetary value trees add so much to our landscape. This class will teach you what trees will grow best in our area; how to plant both bare root or container grown trees, proper care after planting and how to control any possible pests. *Instructor: Sheila Cloonen*

Thursday, April 30 ~ Culinary Herbs, from the Garden to the Kitchen Herbs are some of the easiest plants to grow. They will grow almost anywhere, don't need a lot of fertilizer and generally prefer minimal watering and they will reward you with an abundance of flavor year-round. What more could the casual gardener want! We will discuss which herbs grow best in Texas, which love our hot summers and those that prefer the cooler fall, winter and spring seasons. Learn how to prepare for a garden and how to preserve your bounty. You will learn to make herbal blends, compound butters, party dips, herbal vinegars and more. There will be lots to smell and sample and hopefully some “pass-alongs”. *Instructor: Arlene Hamilton*

Monday, May 4 ~ Small Gardens: Plant a Pocket Garden A vertical garden is a method to grow plants in a container that can hang on a wall. Found in nature and ancient civilizations, living walls have been thriving for centuries on walls all over the world. In this class we will demonstrate several ways you can make your own vertical garden. A handout will be provided to help you complete your home project and also include a demonstration of making your own herb pocket garden. *Instructors: Ruth Spurr and Jane Sloan*

Thursday, May 7 ~ The Rose: Our National Flower A symbol of love and beauty, playing an important role in myth, history and poetry. Come learn how to choose, plant and care for roses in your landscape. *Instructor: Alice Thompson*

All classes cost \$14.00 and are taught from 6:00-7:30pm at Waxahachie High School, Career & Technology Department, 3001 US Hwy 287 Bypass, Waxahachie, TX 75167.

Featured Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



Scrambled Eggs – Fumitory Family (Fumariaceae) *Corydalis* spp.

Region: 1 - 10 (Ellis County is Region 4)

Size: 2 feet

Blooms: Feb. – Sept., Annual/Biennial

Scrambled eggs takes its name from its color and the fact that the blossoms at the top of each stem are so irregularly placed that they look stirred. The upper petal has a spur, so the flower seems not to be attached. Alternate leaves are three to six inches long, divided into five to seven segments, and then divided twice more. It grows in sandy or rocky areas, prairies, fields or woods and along streams or roadsides, especially in disturbed areas. *Corydalis* species found in Texas are difficult to distinguish. They may carry as many as ten alkaloids and at least one known alkaloid in *Corydalis* is still used in medicine. Plants are poisonous to sheep and are suspected of being poisonous to horses.



President's Day – February 17

Leap Year – 29 Days in February



GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR FEBRUARY

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



♥ If you have deciduous fruit trees, look for scale on the limbs this month. It is much easier to spot scale on the branches after the trees have dropped their leaves. Flag the infested branches with fluorescent survey tape so you can find them later in February when they need to be sprayed for best control.

♥ Complete the bare-root planting of woody landscape plants this month. Container and ball and burlapped plants are in good supply and can be set out most any time. Winter and early spring planting provides an opportunity for good establishment before hot weather comes.

♥ Prune roses during February except in the Panhandle and far North Texas, where roses are pruned in March or April. Use good shears that will make clean cuts. Remove dead, dying and weak canes. Leave four to eight healthy canes and remove approximately one-half of the top growth along the height of the plant.

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

♥ Wait until after they finish flowering before pruning spring-flowering shrubs such as quince, azalea, forsythia and spiraea.

♥ Plant dahlia tubers in late February and early March. Plant gladiolus corms; space planting dates at two-week intervals to extend flowering season.

♥ Fertilize pansies once again for continued flowering. Don't forget to water when needed.

♥ A potted plant, tree, shrub or cut flowers make excellent Valentine's gifts for loved ones and shut-ins.

HERBAL PET CARE AND PEST CONTROL

By Arlene Hamilton, ECMG



If your family includes cats, dogs, or other backyard pets, you can keep them healthy and insect free using some common herbs. Herbs are multi-talented members of the plant world. Aside from being the source of both natural and synthesized medicines, they spice up our food and supply us with an array of sweet-smelling perfumes and potpourris. Another use of these wonderful plants is their ability to safely control unwanted insects. Unlike synthetic chemicals, whose ingredients and quantities must be continually revised and increased in response to insects' immunities to them, pests don't become tolerant of botanical repellents.

Many herbs emit powerful aromatic and volatile oils, which may appeal to humans, but are disliked by many insects. Because of their acute sense of smell these aromas are unpleasant to insects. These pests will abandon areas where such herbs in fresh, dried, powdered, or essential oil forms are used. These same herbs are often tolerated, if not enjoyed, by pets.

The strongest herbal repellents against pests such as fleas, lice, ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, and gnats include Citronella, Eucalyptus, Pennyroyal, Rosemary, Southernwood, and Wormwood. Milder ones include Basil, Bay, Lavender, Sage and Thyme.

Citronella - Although there are many lemon aroma plants in garden centers and nurseries labeled as citronella, the one thought to be the most effective as a mosquito control is Lemon grass - (*Cymbopogon citratus*). Lemon grass grows well in North Texas and will winter over down to 10° with heavy mulch. It grows best in full sun, good drainage, and requires little water after established. Plant around sitting areas or harvest the long grass stems, chop into pieces and strew in areas where pets and people like to rest. Exercise caution when handling, as the long blades of grass are sharp and can cause cuts.

Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) is used to repel mice and insects such as fleas. Traditionally, pennyroyal was planted around doorways, used in bedding, and as a strewing herb. Its oil is used commercially in soaps and detergents. A strong infusion of its leaves can be used as an insect spray. Pour two cups of hot water over one cup chopped leaves, let steep for 30 minutes, strain and use as a rinse on your pet. Pennyroyal needs moist, semi-shady conditions for best growth in the South. Note: Pennyroyal leaves should NOT be ingested by pets or people.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) (picture top left) leaves, along with Lavender flowers, make an excellent, soothing, healing, and pest-repellent conditioning rinse for pets. With four cups of hot water, steep one cup fresh, chopped herbs. Steep in a covered container for at least one hour. Cool and strain. Use within one or two days. This tea can also be poured into a spray container and used as a room freshener. Rosemary leaves are gentle enough that fresh leaves can be rubbed directly on pet's skin to provide temporary insect-repelling relief. Rosemary thrives in the North Texas sun and soil. Give it lots of room in the landscape, as it will grow to four feet or more.

Southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) (pictured right) and **Wormwood** (*A. absinthium*) have been used since antiquity to repel insects. Many gardeners find that Artemisias, extremely aromatic herbs, inhibit the growth of neighboring plants. However, set around fences or perimeters of gardens, they can be useful to repel slugs, snails, rodents, and certain small animals. They are also a repellent to garden and cloth moths.



Children Are Natural Gardeners

Ruth Spurr, Ellis County Master Gardener

Children are naturally curious. They love to learn by doing and they love to play in the dirt. Working in a garden, a child can experience the satisfaction that comes from caring for something over time while observing the cycle of life firsthand. Gardening is a great way to teach environmental awareness by exploring the workings of nature.

There are many reasons children should garden. Here are a few. It fosters a sense of responsibility. Being invested and involved in a garden means the associated weeding and watering chores are welcome, and children learn that they are responsible for the care of what's theirs. It provides physical exercise, promotes self-confidence, and develops a sense of patience and an appreciation for delayed gratification.

Gardening also encourages children to eat produce! They grow it and want to eat it. When considering what things to plant for children, choose options that are relatively easy to grow, have short growing seasons and are fun to harvest. These include sunflowers, lettuce, radishes, snow peas, cherry tomatoes, bush beans, carrots, potatoes and pumpkins. Other crops with mixed results are corn, green onions, zucchini, strawberries and watermelon. Give children gloves, real tools (not plastic kiddy toys) and engage them in the entire process from seed to table. The rewards for all can be amazing!

