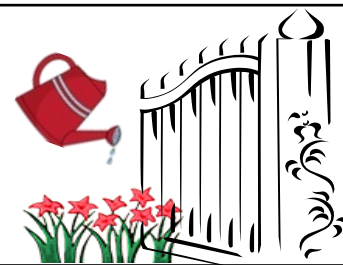




Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume XII, Issue 6

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

October, 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

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Fall Bulb Sale

College Scholarships for Ellis County Students

Offering:
**Crinum lily, Iris, Daffodil,
& More !**

Check out the selection and make your
purchases at :
<https://ecmga.com/>

Sale starts Monday September 21st
Sale ends October 7th

Bulb pick-up will be at Finley Jr. High
2401 Brown St. Waxahachie Oct 10

All purchases will be made on-line,
No purchases day of delivery, All purchases final

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Listen to KBEC

Saturday mornings at 8:10 am on
1390 AM and 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 Rigbsby

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ARBOR DAY ~ NOVEMBER 6



In Texas, Arbor Day first appeared in Temple on February 22, 1889. The first statewide observance was held in Austin in 1890 to encourage the planting of trees. Today, the official Texas State Arbor Day is the first Friday in November – the perfect time to plant a tree!

STOP THE CRAPE MURDER!

By: Greg Grant, Smith County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Hideous crimes are being committed all over Texas, some in our own front yards and many right in front of our local businesses. Unfortunately, many have turned a blind eye to the ongoing massacre. Not me! I can take it no more.

I am officially forming an advocacy group for plant's rights. They cannot speak, so I am going to speak for them. My first mission...to stop Crape Murder!

Lagerstroemia indica: The Crapemyrtle. A native of China. The "Lilac of the South". The most popular flowering tree in the southern United States. Introduced to the U.S. by Frenchman Andre Michaux to South Carolina around 1786. Perhaps the most beautifully branching flowering tree in the world.

Crape myrtles are among the toughest, most adaptable and showiest plants that we can grow in our Texas landscapes. They have very few pests. They bloom all summer long. They require no supplemental irrigation. They have exfoliating bark that reveals spectacular smooth trunks. And they happen to have a branching structure that any floral designer would crave. They pretty much do everything but mow the lawn for us.

But for some reason, a mysterious reason that I have not quite solved, the majority of the "gardeners" (and ALL of the landscape crews) in Texas have made it a horrid ritual of butchering them.

Clip this portion of the article out and take it directly to your spouse, maintenance person or nurseryman. I know of NO educated horticulturist or arborist that endorses the practice of topping crape myrtles or any ornamental trees for that matter. Go ahead. Pick up the phone. Call Neil Sperry. Call Dr. Bill Welch. Call the National Arboretum! You WILL NOT find any plant expert that will condone or recommend this practice.

Then why do we do it? I have several theories. But I am not going to share any of them with you for fear that you might somehow feel justified in your arboreal disfigurement.

I will tell you why not too, however. First of all, it leaves horrible scars and wounds that last forever. That is correct, FOREVER. I can show you exactly where any crape myrtle on earth was topped. It's a "teenage tattoo" that can never be removed. It also makes a profusion of smaller branches resulting in a lack of proportion. All trees have a characteristic shape. It just so happens that crape myrtles have one of the most beautiful. Topping does create larger blooms, though fewer of them. Unfortunately, these larger blooms on new shoots have a tendency to flop over and droop after summer rains (remember when it used to rain in the summer?). And finally, it is downright ugly. We do not hack on dogwoods, redbuds or Japanese maples. So why do we pick out the prettiest one of all to maim? Surely, it's not a "school girl" jealousy thing. How sick can we be to pick out the prettiest belle at the ball and scratch her face?

This practice may look appropriate behind a chain link fence in a Mississippi trailer park, but I can assure you it is not appropriate for any landscape that you intend to be admired. Some of the most beautiful homes in Texas are now marred by embarrassing crape myrtles. On the other hand, take a trip to Baton Rouge, Mobile or Charleston. They have an enduring admiration for their beautiful crape myrtles and wouldn't think of undoing what nature has perfected.

The only pruning crape myrtles require is to thin out the trunks on young trees leaving somewhere around 3 to 7 permanent trunks. The fewer you have the more you can admire their shape and smooth texture. Each year around early spring all you do is remove any new suckers that appear from the ground or from your main trunks. That is it. Yes, if the tree is small you can remove the seedpods but realize that this is purely for aesthetic reason. Removing dried pods during the winter does not promote any more bloom during the summer. Removing them during the summer does promote faster re-bloom, however. This nonsense of pruning back to pencil size wood comes from recommendations

from the 1960's and is outdated. People apparently had a lot more free time on their hands then. There is no telling how many thousands of dollars are wasted on incorrect pruning of crape myrtles. To be quite honest an unpruned crape myrtle is almost always superior in appearance to a "professionally" pruned one. Some things in nature are hard to improve on.

In my personal opinion, any landscape maintenance firm involved in this practice should be immediately fired! They are wasting your time and money and obviously don't care what's best for your plants or your landscape. If they took the time to educate themselves through seminars and reading, they would earn your money through more horticulturally sound practices.

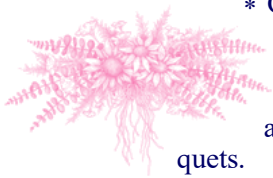
I'm quite sure that the few of you left reading this soapbox diatribe can't wait to tell me what many have done in the past. "But Greg, they got to big!" Much better to cut it to the ground and start over, or pull it out entirely, than to maim it. Most folks do not realize (but should) that there are many, many cultivars of crape myrtles that have an ultimate height range from 3 feet to 30 feet. For heavens sakes, don't plant a 30-foot crape myrtle in a space designed for a 10 foot one.

Check with a reputable nursery. If a tree type is too large, there are many smaller types available, including mildew resistant ones. There are a number of improved semi-dwarf cultivars in the 6-8 foot range including Acoma (white), Hopi (pink), Tonto (fuchsia) and Velma's Royal Delight (purple) that make outstanding small trees. Trees that NEVER need topping, that is.

Thanks to King's Nursery and Greenleaf Nursery, I have planted a collection of commercially available crape myrtle cultivars in the commuter parking lot on University Drive on the SFA University Campus. This will be one of the only places in the state where gardeners can come see what each named cultivar is SUPPOSED to look like; a sort of "abuse free" zone if you will. They will not be sprayed, irrigated or pruned. They will just stand there minding their own business, looking pretty in pink (and other colors as well, of course).

There have been articles on this same subject in *Southern Living*, *Neil Sperry's Gardens* and other southern magazines and newspapers. Unfortunately, the problem here seems to be getting exponentially worse each year. I can only assume that gardeners in Texas either don't read or don't care. Please prove me wrong. STOP THE CRAPE MURDER!



GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR OCTOBER*by Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist, TX A&M*

- * Carefully harvest material for dried arrangements at this time. Choose cockscomb, flowering artemisia, already mature okra pods, flowering oregano stalks and others to enhance fall and winter bouquets.
- * October through November is an excellent time to purchase bulbs while you still have a good selection in the garden center. They may be planted at any time with the exception of tulips and hyacinths.
- * Chill tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator until mid or late December before planting. The lower part of the refrigerator is best. Do not leave bulbs in airtight plastic bags during refrigerated storage.
- * Plant bulbs in well prepared beds so the base of the bulb is at a depth that is three times the diameter of the bulb. In sandy soil, set slightly deeper and in clay soils less deeply.
- * Start collecting leaves for the compost pile. Be sure to have extra soil available so that each 6-inch layer of leaves may be covered with several inches of soil. Always wet the layer of leaves thoroughly before adding the soil. Add about one pound of a complete lawn or garden fertilizer to each layer of leaves to provide the necessary nitrogen for decomposition.
- * Check your nursery or garden center for started plants of snapdragons, pinks, sweet Williams, poppies and calendulas. They will usually provide a riot of spring color.
- * Keep Christmas cactus in a sunny spot where night temperatures can be kept below 65°F. Buds will drop if you allow night temperatures to go above 70°F or if you allow the plant to become excessively dry. They should also be kept in total darkness from 5:00 pm until 8:00 am for about 30 days in October to initiate flower buds.
- * If you have saved seeds of your favorite plants, allow them to become air dry, then place them in an airtight container and store in the refrigerator. Be sure to label each packet carefully. Remember, seed from hybrid plants will seldom resemble the parent plant.
- * Prepare beds for a planting of pansies when they become available at the garden centers. They need a well-drained soil and exposure to at least a half-day of sun. It is best to use started plants, as seeds are difficult to handle.
- * If you are planning to save caladium tubers for another year, dig them in late October and allow to dry in a well ventilated but shady area. After 7 to 10 days, remove leaves and dirt, then pack in dry peat moss, vermiculite or similar material for storage. Pack tubers so they do not touch each other. Dust with all-purpose fungicide as you pack. Place container in an area where temperature won't drop below 50°F.
- * If twig girdlers have worked over your trees so that many twigs and branches are dropping, make sure these are collected and destroyed as the eggs are deposited in that portion of the branch that drops to the ground.
- * There is still time to divide and reset such perennials as phlox, violets, hollyhocks, irises, day lilies and Shasta daisies.
- * October is a good time to reduce the insect and disease potential in next year's garden. Clean up the garden removing all annuals that have completed their life cycle. Remove the tops of all herbaceous perennials that have finished flowering or as soon as frost has killed the leaves.
- * Holly plants with a heavy set of fruit often suffer a fertilizer deficiency. An application of complete fertilizer late this month can be helpful and provide a head start next spring.
- * Do not allow plants with green fruit or berries to suffer from lack of moisture. Hollies will frequently drop their fruit under drought conditions.
- * Prune out dead and diseased wood from trees and shrubs. Hold off on major pruning until midwinter. Pruning now may stimulate tender growth prior to frost.
- * Mulch flower and shrub plantings and vegetable gardens. Mulching now will trap soil warmth and moisture that will benefit plant roots. Mulch will also reduce winter weeds.
- * Turn off the irrigation system for the winter. In the absence of rain, you can turn on the system about once every 3 to 4 weeks through the late fall and winter.
- * Ask a certified professional at your local nursery for Texas Superstars and support local Texas producers.

Featured Plant for October

Gulf Muhly Grass also known as Texas Muhly Grass, Pink Hair Grass or Pink Muhly. This native is a favorite among landscapers for its low growth and drought tolerance. It grows to be around two to five feet tall with a spread of two to three feet. In the fall it produces pink-purple wispy plumes that last around four to six weeks. It should be cut back in winter for better spring growth.



CHRISTMAS CACTUS

*Brenda Ilchner, former Smith County Master Gardener
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service*

Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than a Christmas cactus in full bloom? These beauties come in a variety of colors: red, purple, orange, pink, fuchsia and white. They are native to Central and South America and are very different from the desert cactus we know. Since they are tropical, their needs are different than those of a true cactus.



It always amazes me how the plant knows when it is Christmas. All of a sudden, the lacy blooms just appear. Well not exactly! The key to getting the Christmas cactus to bloom on time is to ensure proper lighting, temperature and watering.

In October and November, the cactus needs to be placed indoors where it will receive indirect bright light during the daylight hours and total darkness at night of at least 12 to 13 hours. Placing it in a dark room or covering with a dark trash bag will provide the needed darkness.

The Christmas cactus needs to be placed where the temperatures are cool during the fall months. Fertilize with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer. Since the cactus is a tropical plant, it needs to be watered like a tropical plant. Do not let the plant dry out. Water when the top half of the soil feels dry to the touch. Over watering will cause buds to drop.

The best time for repotting is in February, March and April. Keep in mind that the plant will flower best if it is kept in a container where it is pot-bound. If pruning is to be done, you need

to do it before the buds form on the tips. Go easy on fertilizing so as not to have only vegetative growth.

If a stem breaks off, place it in a pot of sandy type soil. Keep it in bright indirect light and moist soil. In two to three weeks you will see signs of growth.

Place the potted cactus outside in the summer in an area where it will be protected from the strong afternoon sun. Bring in before the first frost.

Finally, just enjoy this beautiful plant during the Christmas holidays.

IT'S OCTOBER ~ WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

PLANTING

- * Plant cool season annuals such as pinks, snapdragons and ornamental cabbages and kale early in the month. Wait until temperatures have cooled to plant pansies and violas.
- * Complete planting these fall vegetables early in the month: radishes, spinach and turnips.
- * Last chance to sow wildflowers in order to have blooms next spring. Always purchase "fresh" seed.
- * Purchase spring-flowering bulbs while selection is good. Chill tulip and Dutch hyacinth at 45°F for 60 days prior to planting. Daffodil and grape hyacinth require no special handling but should be stored in a cool location until planting (soil temperature below 55°F). Recommended daffodil varieties include Ice Follies, Fortune, Charlton, Cheerfulness and Tahiti.
- * Fall is a great time to set out perennial herbs, including thyme, oregano, rosemary, parsley, lemon balm, pineapple sage and Mexican mint marigold. Work a few inches of compost into soil prior to planting and mulch the plants after planting.

FERTILIZING and PRUNING

- * Remove annuals that have completed their life cycle. Leave seed pods to self-seed next year (cleome, cosmos, four o'clock).
- * Continue to feed topical plants in containers and hanging baskets with water-soluble fertilizer. Cut back or repot overgrown houseplants and fertilize with same fertilizer.
- * Spring and summer-flowering shrubs and vines (including climbing roses, wisteria, etc.) should not be pruned at this time because they have already established their buds for next year's bloom. Prune these plants immediately after they stop blooming next year.

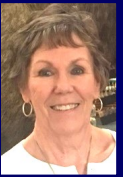
GARDEN WATCH

- * Watch for brown-patch fungus on St. Augustine lawns. Water only in the mornings and apply turf fungicide at first sign of fungus.
- * Watch for cutworms and looper caterpillars on young leafy vegetables. Products containing Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) are safe to control these pests. Control aphids with a strong spray of water or insecticidal soap.
- * Attention, Christmas cactus owners! To initiate flower buds, give the plants bright light each day followed by 12-14 hours of total of darkness at night, for 30 days starting mid-month. And keep night temperatures under 65°F.



Texas Wild Flower of the Month

*Submitted by Melinda Kocian
Ellis County Master Gardener*



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

Region: 1 – 10 (Ellis County is Region 4)
Size: 1 foot
Blooms: November – June, Perennial

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

IT'S NOVEMBER ~ WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

PLANTING

- * Now through February is the perfect time to plant container-grown trees and shrubs. Dig a hole two times the diameter and one inch shallower than the root ball. Make sure the root ball and the hole are thoroughly wet before planting. Backfill with existing soil and water well.
- * Use the "Custom Tree Selector" at <http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu> for help in selecting the right tree for the right location. Also, see "Native and Adapted Plants for North Texas" at <https://wateruniversity.tamu.edu/about/publications>.
- * Plant pansies and violas now. Bluebonnets can still be planted from transplants.
- * Daffodils and grape hyacinth may be planted once soil temperature drops below 55°F. Plant 2-3 times as deep as the bulb is tall.

FERTILIZING and PRUNING

- * Feed winter annuals growing in the ground and in outdoor containers with a high-nitrogen, water-soluble plant food every two to three weeks. Also, feed and water cool-season vegetables that you are growing now.
- * Trim patio plants and hanging baskets before moving indoors for the winter. Locate them near bright windows.
- * Refrain from pruning freeze-damaged woody plants at this time. This pruning is best done in late winter.

GARDEN WATCH

- * It's time to winterize! Disconnect hoses from faucets and drain all hose-end sprinklers. Drain fuel from gasoline-powered engines and run the carburetor dry. Greenhouse owners should check the heating and ventilation systems to ensure proper operation.
- * Check outdoor potted plants for insects (mealybugs, whiteflies, spider mites, aphids, roaches, ants) before moving inside for the winter. Apply a labeled insecticide if needed.
- * When planning new landscapes, select trees, shrubs and perennials that are winter hardy in your area. According to the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone map, Ellis County is located in Zone 8 (average lowest annual temperature is 10°F to 20°F). Therefore, it is best to choose plants listed for Zone 8, or the one or two zones to the north (Zone 6 or 7).

VETERAN'S DAY ~ NOVEMBER 11

FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON ... including BAGWORMS!

Submitted by Rob Franks, Ellis County Master Gardener

I recently fielded a question directed to the Ellis County AgriLife office about bagworms. Bagworms are not worms but rather caterpillars that protect themselves by building bags out of silk and leaves or evergreen needles. Usually in light infestations hand picking will work for control but the caller indicated that not only were her cedars being eaten but also her roses, crape myrtles and oak trees. And she indicated that the worms had been getting worse over several years. The caller had a problem that was not going to be easy to treat but could be resolved by treating using proper timing.



Once the worms are in their bags, they are pretty much able to ride out any treatment other than hand picking. If they are picked, resist burning them due to city and county fire regulations, and it can also make your next brisket taste funny. Put them in a yard bag and let the big truck carry them off to the land fill.

All summer the worms (caterpillars) have been feeding on her plants safe within their bags where they can be treated with limited success with Pryethroid insecticides. I did not recommend spraying with Pryethroids because they are non-specific and will kill helpful insects as well. Additionally, considering our wind and her tree height it would be hard to control the spray to get good coverage.

Fall is a different story because both male and female worms stop feeding and they are safe. The males turn into moths to find the females that stay in their bags with their eggs. Once the worms are no longer feeding it is impossible to spray successfully, and picking is the only treatment if the worms are not too high up to safely reach.

The best time to treat is in the spring when the bagworms hatch (May to early June). Preparations need to start in the fall by harvesting a few worm bags. The bags will come off with some difficulty because the worms have attached their bags for the winter. The bags go in a jar with a screen or small holes in the lid and that jar put in a shady spot until the next spring. When the eggs hatch and the young worms are emerging in the jar, they are also emerging on the plants and will be easier to treat.

Caterpillars, like bagworms and tent caterpillars, can be treated with a bacteria when you spray them or their food source. Using *Bacillus Thuringiensis* spray will target the worms rather than beneficial insects. Spraying may have to be done more than once (about a week apart) to get complete coverage, and make sure that the entire plant has been sprayed. The worms can still be sprayed with the Pryethroid pesticide if the *Bacillus Thuringiensis* spray does not do the job, but that is more of a last resort.

Burning worm bags on the plants is not recommended because that causes even more damage to stressed-out trees and bushes.

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR NOVEMBER

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

- * Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.
- * Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- * Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well-lighted window.
- * Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- * Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- * November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs.
- * Continue to set out cool season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons and dianthus. Sweet peas may also be planted now in the southern half of the state.
- * Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- * Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.
- * Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.
- * Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter and have beds ready to plant when needed.
- * Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted after they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- * Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half, to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.
- * Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.
- * Berry plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.



FALL RECIPES

Submitted by Marilyn Nash, ECMG

PUMPKIN OATMEAL JAM MUFFINS

<i>2 medium very ripe bananas</i>	<i>1 tsp baking powder</i>
<i>1/2 cup canned pumpkin</i>	<i>1/2 tsp cinnamon</i>
<i>1 egg</i>	<i>2-1/4 cups Old Fashion Oats</i>
<i>1/3 cup almond milk</i>	<i>1 tsp Splenda</i>
<i>1 tsp vanilla extract</i>	<i>No sugar Orange Marmalade</i>



In a bowl whisk together mashed bananas, canned pumpkin, egg, almond milk and vanilla.

Stir in baking powder, oats and Splenda.

Divide into lightly sprayed muffin pan for 12 muffins.

Put 1/2 to 1 Tbsp of Orange Marmalade in the center of each muffin.

Bake at 350° for 22 minutes.

Store all leftovers in refrigerator. Can be reheated in microwave for 30 seconds for a fresh baked flavor.

PUMPKIN CHEESECAKE



<i>3 eggs</i>	<i>3/4 cup canned pumpkin</i>
<i>3 cups Nonfat Greek Yogurt</i>	<i>1 tsp pumpkin pie spice</i>
<i>1 small box sugar free pudding</i>	<i>1 tsp cinnamon</i>
<i>(cheesecake or vanilla)</i>	<i>1 Tbsp stevia</i>
<i>1/2 tsp vanilla extract</i>	

Mix all ingredients in a bowl. Add to a lightly greased pie dish. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Cool for 30 minutes prior to putting plastic wrap over and cooling overnight. Keep refrigerated. Serve with blueberries.

FRESH PEAR SALAD

<i>2 small pears</i>	<i>1 small cucumber</i>
<i>2 ribs celery</i>	<i>1 cup small tomatoes (cut in half)</i>
<i>3 small sweet peppers</i>	<i>2 tablespoons Italian Dressing</i>



Dice all vegetables, add in Italian dressing and sprinkle with Mrs. Dash Lemon Pepper Seasoning

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR DECEMBER

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

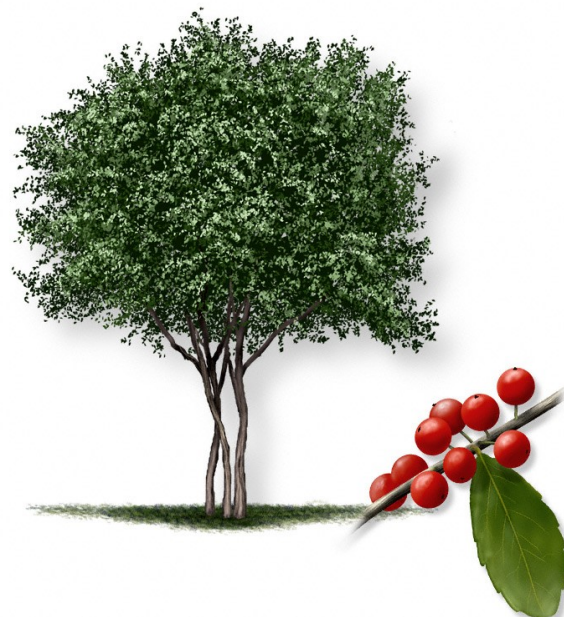
- * Don't forget to give your landscape a steady amount of water through irrigation or by hand if there is not adequate rain.
- * As soon as the November weather appears to be settled, it is time to select and plant such annuals as pansies, violas and ornamental cabbages and kale.
- * Plan now for your spring flowering season with a mixture of annuals and perennials.
- * Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- * Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want. In addition to ordering seeds that you are already familiar with try a few new kinds each year to broaden your garden contents.
- * November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs.
- * Bring in late-blooming plants such as decorative kalanchoes or Christmas cactus so they may finish flowering in the warmth of the house.
- * Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well-lighted window.
- * Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- * Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- * Continue to set out cool season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons and dianthus.
- * Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- * Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't overwater. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- * Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter and have beds ready to plant when needed.
- * Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time in December if they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- * Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.
- * Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.
- * Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.
- * Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.

Trees Conserve Energy – Trees lower air conditioning bills from 10 to 50% by shading a home from the summer sun. If you plant deciduous trees on southeast, southwest or west side of your home, you can enjoy shade in the summer and sunshine during the winter. A row of evergreen trees on the north or northwest side can also reduce heating bills by buffering your home from prevailing winter winds.

Trees Provide Wildlife Habitat – Birds, mammals, small reptiles and insects depend on trees for food and shelter. Oak trees produce acorns eaten by many animals. Flowering trees attract pollinators like bees and butterflies.

Featured Plant for December: Yaupon Holly is a thicket-forming evergreen shrub or small, multi-trunked tree growing to 25 feet tall with stems up to six inches in diameter and has a dense, conical or rounded crown of dark green foliage. It produces red, translucent, berry-like drupe about a quarter of an inch in diameter on a short stalk ripening in late fall and often produced in great abundance.

Interesting Facts: Yaupon leaves contain a small amount of caffeine and can be steeped into a weak tea. They also have been used ceremonially by native Americans as a purgative called "the black drink", thus providing the source for the Latin series name, "vomitoria". The berries are favored by several bird species.





IT'S DECEMBER ~ WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

PLANTING

- * Plant berry-producing trees and shrubs to add winter color to your landscape. Choices include possumhaw and yaupon holly, Caroline buckthorn, rusty blackhaw viburnum and American beautyberry.
- * Plant pre-chilled tulip and hyacinth bulbs mid to late month. Plant bulbs in masses for best effect.
- * Daffodil bulbs may still be planted. Look for early and small-flowering varieties that tend to naturalize and return yearly.
- * Considering a living Christmas tree? Choose an adapted plant. Junipers, Arizona cypress and pyramidal hollies are good options. While indoors, place the tree in the brightest natural light and keep soil moist. Do not leave indoors for more than two weeks.

FERTILIZING and PRUNING

- * Apply a root stimulator such as liquid seaweed or a high-phosphorus fertilizer to newly planted trees and shrubs.
- * Do not top crape myrtles or remove the central leader of any shade tree. It destroys the crape myrtle's natural shape, and delays blooming by five or six weeks. If your plant is too tall or too wide, remove or relocate it, and replace with something smaller that will not require trimming.
- * Remove mistletoe from trees as soon as it becomes visible. Use a pole pruner to remove the entire twig from infected branches before the mistletoe produces berries. There are no effective consumer products to control this parasitic plant.

GARDEN WATCH

- * Protect tender vegetation from the cold with a lightweight frost cloth available at most nurseries and garden centers.
- * Continue to water lawns, newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials if rainfall is insufficient.
- * Prepare garden soil for spring planting by tilling in six inches of organic matter (compost) to a depth of eight to ten inches.
- * Take time during the holidays to check out the new seed and nursery catalogues. Order early to ensure availability.
- * Let's not forget our feathered friends during the winter when their natural food supply is limited. Providing sunflower, safflower and thistle seed, suet and fruit will attract many species of birds to your backyard. And be sure to provide water.



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

The editors wish everyone a Happy Halloween, a blessed Thanksgiving and a very, merry Christmas. We hope you have spent time in your gardens this year and found the information in the newsletters useful. We look forward to a new year of getting together and sharing our flowers, vegetables and knowledge. 2021 here we come!