



# E-Gardening Newsletter

## Table Of Contents

<b>Its March: What to do this Month PAGE 2</b>		<b>Grand Gardening PAGE 3</b>	<b>Bagworms Page 5</b>
<b>My Peanut Plant PAGE 6</b>	<b>Peanut Brittle PAGE 7</b>	<b>Bluebonnet Trails PAGE 8</b>	<b>African Violets PAGE 10</b>

## ★ EXPO '23 ★



# Go Wild for Wildflowers

**March 25 ★ Waxahachie Civic Center ★ 9am-4pm**

## Spotlight on the Children's Workshop at Expo

There's excitement and education happening again this year in the Crape Myrtle room of the Civic Center.

This year our theme is "Wild About Gardening" and we are leaning into the wild side of gardening with some exhibitors that will excite and educate the kids.

**Texas Discovery Gardens** will be joining us with live butterflies, moths and bugs to examine.

Amethyst Stone of the facebook page "*What kind of snake is this? North Texas*", will be bringing her collection of native Texas snakes to observe, and the **John Bunker Sands Wetlands Center** will have a tank full of micro invertebrates to explore.

Also on hand will be Ellis County Heritage Farm, Keep Waxahachie Beautiful and lots of Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners with some "getting your hands dirty" activities from pollination to composting. Come join us March 25<sup>th</sup> as we get "*Wild About Gardening*"!



- If frost or freeze is predicted, cover tender vegetables and annuals with frost cloth. It can make a six to eight-degree difference.
- Beware of close-out sales on bare-root trees as survival rate is low when planted this late in the season. Spend a little more on container-grown plants.
- Control black spot, powdery mildew and thrips on roses with an appropriate fungicide or systemic insecticide. Use a stream of water or insecticidal soap on aphids.
- Apply pre-emergent herbicides on lawns to control broadleaf and grassy weeds if needed. A “weed and feed” fertilizer is not recommended because it is too early to fertilize lawns.

Use sunscreen.



# Grand Gardening

by Melanie Wallace, ECMG

Gardening incorporates many of the things that little kids love the most. Getting dirty. Playing outside. Using fun, "grown up" tools. And, most especially, spending time with their grandparents.

We moved down the street from our four grandsons when they were 5, 3, 3 (yes, twins!) and 1. While we were not gardeners at that time, the magicians who sold us our house definitely

*"To plant a garden is to  
believe in tomorrow."*

AUDREY HEPBURN

*The same can be said about investing  
time in our grands.*

were. They had planted beautiful flower beds, peach, pear, and plum trees, and four of the most gorgeous and fertile raised vegetable beds you've ever seen. While Papa and I had never so much as kept a house plant alive, we felt a real responsibility to be good stewards of this beautiful garden with which we had been gifted. So, we set about to learn as much as we could.

It was a win-win. The grands loved it. And we fell in love with the garden and gardening.

That first spring and summer were magic. Every Friday afternoon, we would hear the little band of brothers as they toddled their ways down the sidewalk (with parental supervision, of course) to our backyard. They always ran the last two or three house lengths, giggling and excited to get into the back yard to start digging.

I purchased four little color-coordinated garden trugs, (one for each boy) and collected spades, gloves, goggles, plastic watering cans, aprons and hats. I even added a pair of kid binoculars in each trug, just in case any tiny critters showed themselves, and the boys wanted a closer look.

Each Friday afternoon, upon entering the back yard, those boys ran to the potting shed and grabbed their gear...ready to begin the fun.

We started the process early that spring by taking the whole gang down to the garden center to pick out a few of their favorite things. We ended up with a bunch of pumpkin and watermelon seeds, some tomatoes and strawberries, and some pepper plants. Pops and I filled in with the rest of the garden later on.

When the time was ripe, we planted our seeds and seedlings, and the boys watched with rapt attention, as they began to sprout and grow. I added a plastic ruler and little notebook and pencil to the trugs. Our five year old enjoyed measuring and recording the progress of some of the plants. The little ones scribbled in their notebooks, but as we old teachers know...that's the first step in developing a great writer!

Every Friday that summer, the boys would come over, excited to dig and play and record their findings. One special day, we harvested our first (and only) ripe strawberry. Papa and I had guarded that strawberry







all week long, just waiting to share it with the boys. And it did not disappoint. All six of us took a tiny bite from the sweet, delicious berry, moaning with pleasure as we passed it around and took our turn. That's still one of my very favorite memories of our times with the boys.

After running and playing and digging and weeding (they got pretty good at determining which were plants and which were weeds), the tykes, tired and dirty and hungry, would run to the big bathtub at dusk and take bubble baths while Papa supervised and I finished up

dinner. Of course, I always incorporated anything that they had grown and harvested into our dinner menu. Crazy what a kid will eat if he grew it himself.

Fed and clean and tired little boys (dressed each week in matching garden-inspired jammies, of course) would climb the staircase to their "Nana-room," where Pops and I took turns reading garden-inspired books and singing good-night songs.

We all slept very well on Friday nights that summer.

The boys are older now (11-9-9-7) and, after a two-year tour in South Korea, we have moved to a new house - one with a yet-to-be-developed garden (where are those magical previous owners when you need them?). But the boys' love of the garden inspired a desire for Pops and me to learn more and do more with the grands in our new garden. I'll share some of those projects in months to come.



## **A Dirty Dozen -books about gardening for littles**

**Planting a Rainbow - Lois Ehlert**

**The Little Red Hen - Paul Galdone**

**Tops and Bottoms - Janet Stevens**

**From Seed to Plant - Gail Gibbons**

**Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt -**

**Kate Messner & Christopher Silas Neal**

**A Perfect Day for Digging - Cari Best & Christine Davenier**

**Worm Weather - Jean Taft**

**Grow Happy - Jon Lasser**

**Inch By Inch: The Garden Song - David Mallett**

**Inch by Inch - Leo Lionni**

**The Tiny Seed - Eric Carle**

**Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth -**

**Mary McKenna Siddals**

## PREPARE TO TREAT FOR BAGWORMS NOW!

by Rob Franks, ECMG

You may have had bagworm issues last year and called the local pest control to spray your yard and they used a pesticide that is non-specific and kills everything, bad as well as good insects. Additionally you were probably not told that once you started seeing the new bags the worms were pretty much safe. There is a better way that is more environmentally friendly that targets only the bagworms and mid-winter is a good time to start preparing to determine when the worms are most vulnerable.

Bagworms can be treated effectively if you catch them in the right life stage. Worms hatch out in the early spring and begin feeding shortly thereafter. As they feed, they begin gathering materials to build their protective bag. A female worm never leaves her bag, lays eggs in her bag, dies, and the eggs over-winter, protected by the bag. When the weather becomes favorable in spring the eggs hatch and begin the next cycle.



Go out into your yard now and pick about 15 bags off your trees and shrubs and put them in a sealed plastic bag or jar. The bags that you will find are either abandoned male bags or female bags that contain eggs. Place the bags where they are exposed to outside temperature, out of the light, and watch the bag. When you start seeing tiny worms moving about in the bag, it is time to treat for them. It is important to treat while the worms are tiny and actively feeding before they can build their bags.

The most effective and environmentally friendly treatment is a spray of *Bacillus thuringiensis* or BT. This is a naturally occurring bacteria that makes toxins that affect immature insects (larva/caterpillars) when they eat it. The bagless larva will eat foliage that has been sprayed with the BT solution and get very ill. BT does not affect a wide range of insects like most chemical pesticides and the bacteria are only active for a few days after they are sprayed on your trees and shrubs. The bagworms have only one cycle a year, so at worst case you will have a lot fewer worms this summer.

Last year BT sold out quickly because it is an effective treatment for bagworms, army worms, and tent caterpillars but currently currently stores have it on their shelves. You might want to purchase a couple of bottles while there is plenty available.

### Resources

<https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/library/gardening/bagworms/>





# Adventures in Gardening – *My Peanut Plant*

by Marj McClung, ECMG

It was Spring, and I was in a garden center! The sun was shining, birds sang--well, they were grackles--but still, I'm sure to a lady grackle it was melodic. I was trying to stay away from the brightly blooming cool season annuals and concentrate on vegetables. I had found a lovely bell pepper, a healthy jalapeno and a lush yellow squash when I saw it, there on the shelf marked P, a peanut plant!

"What fun," I thought. "I can write about this for the newsletter." So I put the pretty little dark green legume in my basket and went on to debate which tomato variety I wanted. I was off to a good start.

Then I went home and planted it. Right away. Without research. I mean, it was a peanut, not an exotic, tropical fruit. Besides, I'm a Master Gardener. I know stuff.

Of course, one of the things I should know is to look up plants you've never grown before.

I plant my vegetables in an extreme raised bed (see our newsletter for January 2023) which is a horse trough on railroad ties filled with a loose soil mix. I vaguely thought that peanuts like sandy soil, so I did not add compost but just planted it at the end of the container. I knew that peanuts grow beneath the soil, so I reasoned that the upper plant could fill in the space and drape gracefully over the side...which it did. Those of you who actually know how to grow peanuts should remember that it's not nice to laugh at those whose brains sometimes forget to work.



As it turned out, I did most things right. The sandy soil preference is more for harvesting than nutrition. My peanut was happy with the nutrition it got from good garden soil, and the loose soil made digging it up in late fall easy. If I had planted in our Blackland clay soil, I would have had to really amend the soil first, or the sticky clay would have held onto the peanuts.

It also didn't demand a lot of water and was okay with the watering I did for the other vegetables in the container, since the soil had good drainage. Per the Texas peanut production report, the drought did reduce yields in 2022.



It wasn't until the plant started to produce lovely golden blooms that it occurred to me that peanuts are seeds, unlike potatoes which are tubers. Seeds grow from fertilized flowers. With the flowers growing over the plant, how does the peanut get underground? So finally, I got on the internet to look up how to grow peanuts.

As it turns out, the flower produces a tiny pod on a stem called a peg which heads down and burrows into the soil. The parts of my plant that grew out into the container produced peanuts. The half of the plant that grew up and out over the side produced pods that died, since the ground

was several feet below. It became a large, lush plant that should have had a big harvest, but for my rookie error in planting in the wrong place.

Peanuts can be harvested 140 to 150 days after planting. When the soil is neither too wet nor too dry, dig up the whole plant and gently shake off the soil. Leave the peanut plant with roots and peanuts side up to dry out for several days.

Although Texas ranks 2nd in U.S. peanut production, most of this is in west Texas, not Ellis County. So I would recommend growing peanuts here in containers....in the middle of wide containers...as a fun project. Just look up about growing peanuts before planting.

Excuse me, I have to go RESEARCH how to roast peanuts.



### **Resources**

<https://www.nationalpeanutboard.org/peanut-info/how-peanuts-grow.htm>

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/guides/crop-briefs/peanuts-in-texas/>



### **Microwave Peanut Brittle**

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup light corn syrup
- Dash of salt
- 1 to 1½ cups shelled raw peanuts
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Makes about 1 pound

1. Grease baking sheet heavily. Combine sugar, corn syrup, and salt in 3-quart casserole. Stir in peanuts. Microwave at HIGH (100%) until light brown, 8 to 10 minutes (8 minutes for 1250 w microwave, more time for lower powered microwaves), stirring the mixture once or twice during cooking. Peanuts brown a little more after removing from the microwave, so don't allow to brown too much during cooking in the microwave to avoid burning.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients until the syrup is light and foamy and the butter is completely melted. Quickly spread on greased baking sheet. Spread as thin as possible for brittle candy. Cool; break into pieces.



submitted by Donna Summerlin, ECMG intern



# Bluebonnet Trails: Let the Adventure Begin

by Elizabeth Norris, ECMG Intern



Watercolor by Donna Summerlin,  
ECMG intern

How many of us have childhood memories of driving in the backseat of our parents' car with the windows rolled down and the wind blowing on our faces in anticipation of sighting a beautiful display of bluebonnets in spring time? The end of March and early April always bring back these special memories for me. Picnic baskets full of fried chicken, potato salad and blackberry cobbler waiting for the perfect spot to settle into a roadside picnic area surrounded by the picturesque beauty of our beloved state flower. I often think that Van Gogh would have loved seeing these in full array, and I wonder how lovely his artist's eye would have portrayed these incredibly special gifts of nature.

Whether or not your memories have been jogged by the above, it's time to put the Bluebonnet, genus *Lupinus*, front and center of your mindset and start planning your own bluebonnet trail adventures for 2023! Depending on weather such as temperatures and rainfall, the season usually begins early April and often peaks around the middle of April. Don't delay much past that, or you'll find they may disappear completely by the end of April.

While there are more than a few great bluebonnet trails between Big Bend,

Hill Country and DFW, some of the best trails are right here in Ellis County by way of Ennis.

In 1997, the state legislature designated Ennis as the home of the Official Texas Bluebonnet Trail and as the Official Bluebonnet City of Texas. Beginning April 1-30, 2023, Ennis will be showcasing over 40 miles of mapped Bluebonnet Trails to plan your sightseeing road trips. Maps for these trails will be available online beginning 4/1/23. It has been stated that these trails are the oldest such known trails in the state. The Ennis Garden Club sponsors these famous trails, and their members will actually drive the trails to provide feedback to the Ennis Welcome Center on the latest status of the bluebonnets. This allows the Welcome Center to keep visitors informed about where the best flowers are on the trails at the time of their visit. Be sure to check this website: <https://www.bluebonnettrail.org>; or call 972-878-4748 before your visit to be sure and catch the bluebonnets at their peak.

Don't forget the Ennis Bluebonnet Trail Festival will be April 14-16 this year. Along with enjoying a scenic country drive, there are more than a few spots to check out along the way. One example is Sugar Ridge Winery, off Sugar Ridge Road on one of the 4 main bluebonnet trails. They often host a bluebonnet event at their winery with food trucks, wine tastings and sometimes live entertainment. Be sure to check their website for details of these events.





To make sure your bluebonnet trail ride or hike is the best possible, be sure to keep these tips in mind:

- ⇒ Be prepared for traffic and short delays due to the number of visitors checking out these trails. Remember to relax and enjoy the scenery
- ⇒ As Rick Steves would say, plan ahead which trails you want to discover and bring along maps that are available online
- ⇒ Make sure children and other guests take advantage of a restroom break before you hit the trails
- ⇒ Bring educational materials/activities for young children to be involved with--this will help keep them busy during unavoidable delays from onlooking traffic
- ⇒ Make sure your gas tank has a good supply of gas
- ⇒ Bring water or other hydrating refreshments along
- ⇒ Bring your camera, as you won't want to miss these amazing photo opportunities
- ⇒ Be considerate of other visitors who may be driving behind you or pulled over on the side of the road
- ⇒ If you do pull over to the side of the road, make sure you're not violating 'No Trespassing' areas or causing damage to property owner's land; also be sure to get out on the side away from oncoming or passing through traffic
- ⇒ Be considerate of others who have pulled over and leave plenty of space between other cars
- ⇒ Be mindful of small children who may run out into the street or be hidden in the grass along the side of the road
- ⇒ Watch out for ant hills, snakes, barbed wire, cactus and other potentially harmful objects
- ⇒ Check your car's emergency kit and be sure to have insect repellent, antiseptic spray and hand sanitizer available
- ⇒ Be sure to bring/use sunscreen and wear sun protective hats/clothing and especially comfortable tennis type shoes and socks
- ⇒ Once you return home, if you've been out in the fields, be sure to bathe young children to wash off any pesticides or chiggers etc.

A fun fact about how the Lupine got its common name of bluebonnet: legend has it that the shape of the petals on the flower resembled the bonnets worn by pioneer women to shield them from the sun. Thanks to Lady Bird Johnson and the Highway Beautification Act that was passed in 1965, we can enjoy our lovely bluebonnets and other Texas native plants along many of our highways.

Now, for one of the most asked questions about bluebonnets: Is it illegal to pick bluebonnets in the state of Texas? The simple answer is no, it is not illegal. However, it is illegal to pluck anything off of state land. It is also illegal to trespass on private property to take your photos.

With all these trails have to offer, you're sure to have some memorable photos and memories to share for years to come! I hope to see you out on the trails!!



# African Violet (*Saintpaulia ionantha*)

by Sharon McIver – ECMG



One of my favorite houseplants is the African violet. Growing up, my mother always kept a table full of them at the front window of our home. Their assorted colors and shapes always brought a special warmth. Mother used to trade plant starts with her friends so that there were often new varieties in her collection. African violets are easy to grow and provide vibrant blooms throughout the year.

African violets aren't truly violets. They are tropical plants whose flowers are similar in shape and color to violets. Early reports of

the plant were made by Sir John Kirk while traveling off the coast of Zanzibar around 1884 and by Rev. W.E. Taylor who saw them in the Shimba mountains in 1887. In 1892, plant seeds were sent from Captain Baron Walter von Saint Paul, the German Imperial District Captain of Usambara, to his father, Hermann Wendland, director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Herrenhausen, in Hanover, Germany. Wendland authored the first scientific description of the plant. African violets were first grown commercially around 1893 at a seed house in East Germany.

African violets are recognized for their simple elegance as well as their medicinal value. The plant is often used in naturopathic medicine. The flowers symbolize subtlety, simplicity, and delicacy. Supposedly, upon being gifted to a person, it emits peace and tranquility both to the giver and recipient.

African violets are easily cultivated using the following recommendations:

- \* Provide 10-12 hours of sunlight daily- preferably filtered in brighter summer months.
- \* Room temperature should be between 65° and 80°F with about 80% humidity. Avoid temperature fluctuations and sudden drafts. Do not mist the leaves.
- \* Use room temperature water to water plants from the bottom. Watering from the top can cause crown rot. Do not saturate the soil. Do not let the pot sit in water for more than 30 minutes.
- \* Re-pot plants annually using a light soil mixture of equal parts peat, vermiculite, and perlite. Plants like to be slightly rootbound, so select a pot with good drainage that is about 1/3 the width of the plant's leaf span. Avoid use of clay pots as they allow salt build-up. This can harm the plant roots and crown.
- \* Apply liquid fertilizer at ¼ strength with each watering. Product should contain equal parts nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.
- \* Watch out for pests such as spider mites and aphids that can commonly infest the plants.

## For additional information, visit

<https://gesneriads.info/articles/saintpaulia/saintpaulia/>

<https://homeflower.us/spiritual-meaning-of-the-african-violet>

<https://gardens.si.edu/learn/educational-resources/plant-care-sheets/care-of-african-violets>

## References:

1. Smith, Jeffrey, B.S., M.S., PhD. (Botany), of Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Saintpaulia – The African Violet
2. Smithsonian Institution: Smithsonian Gardens-Care of African Violets