

# E-Gardening Newsletter

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★ **From the Ellis County Master Gardeners, Thank You!** ★



Thank you to our sponsors; thank you to all who attended! Thank you to the Master Gardeners who volunteered to work in planning, preparing, setting up and managing this year's EXPO.

*Did you know the donations from our sponsors goes toward scholarships for students attending college to study Horticulture? This year was a marvelous success. Again, Thank you!*



# what to do in April



## PLANTING

Annuals and perennials: direct seed or transplant. Allow transplants to harden off before introducing them to full sun. Try some *Texas Superstar Plants*, recommended by Texas A&M Agrilife as performing especially well throughout our state.

<https://texassuperstar.com/plants/index.html>

Lawns: now is the best time to plant Bermudagrass and St. Augustine grass sod. Grade and smooth area prior to installing sod to ensure good soil contact. Keep moist until roots are established. Seeded varieties of Bermudagrass may be sown starting mid-month. Keep soil moist until seeds germinate and grass has established a good root system.

Herbs: basil, catnip/catmint, comfrey, fennel, horseradish, feverfew, oregano, thyme, rosemary, Mexican mint marigold, peppermint, lemongrass, lemon balm, lemon verbena, bay laurel.

Vegetables: corn, cucumber, eggplant, okra, peppers, southern peas, summer squash, tomatoes, beans, and melons.. Check the *Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Vegetable Variety Selector for Ellis County*

[https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/publications/veg\\_variety/select.php](https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/publications/veg_variety/select.php)

## FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

Soil purchased for use in beds, low areas and containers should be examined closely. Nutsedge and other weeds are often brought into the yard through contaminated soil sources.

Add compost to beds. Mulch as you cut back dormant perennials. Fertilize with slow-release granular late in the month or as dormant perennials leaf out. Add compost around trees and fertilize. Be sure to dig out grass several feet from the trunk, ideally to the drip line of the tree canopy.

Fertilize established lawns with an 8-2-4 or other similar ratio. Do not use "Weed and Feed" products.

Look for rose rosette disease. New growth on diseased roses exhibits elongated/enlarged canes, reddish leaves and stems, and excessive thorns. Remove and destroy infected plants and roots immediately. There is no proven control for this fatal disease.

## GARDEN WATCH

Watch for aphids and spider mites. It's easy to spray them off with a hard blast of water. Be sure to get the undersides of the leaves. Ladybugs and green lacewings will be chomping down those aphids, so watch for them and their larvae. Watch for tomato hornworms on tomatoes: squish or spray the plants with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), a natural caterpillar control that won't harm you or pets. To fend off squash vine borers, keep row cover on and hand pollinate.

Do not let weeds go to seed. Do not apply chemicals: pull them up or mow down before they set seed.

**HYDRATE! USE SUNSCREEN! WEAR A HAT!**

# HOW TO GROW YOUR OWN Lemons

## in North Texas



by Jane Slone, ECMG

Lemon trees are evergreen citruses with a pleasant aroma that produce tart, yellow fruits. Lemon trees are not hardy in our zone 8 winters, they can, however, be grown indoors if given appropriate care. It is important to determine what the trees need as they grow; you can help it adapt to its indoor environment. Before you know it, your lemon plant will be thriving and ready to harvest!

**Pick Meyer lemon trees for growing indoors.** Meyer lemon trees are the best and most adaptable tree for growing inside. They produce copious quantities of small or medium fruits, and their maintenance level is more friendly for beginners. Pink variegated lemon trees also grow well indoors and are beginner friendly.

- Buy a lemon tree at least 2-3 years old, as young trees may not grow indoors as well. Although you can grow lemon trees from seed, they are less likely to adapt to indoor climates and will not produce the same as their parent tree.

**Choose a deep plastic pot for your lemon plant.** Plastic pots are ideal for lemon trees, so you can move the plant around as the seasons (and light sources) change. Look for a plastic pot with plenty of depth to help your tree balance as it gets larger and produces fruits! Choose a pot that has drainage holes to prevent your plant from getting waterlogged.

**Find a saucer large enough to fit beneath the container.** Place a few pebbles or gravel on the saucer and add a little water before placing the container on the saucer and the pebbles. The water-filled saucer will help maintain a trace amount of humidity around your tree.

- You can cut a strip of landscaper's cloth and place it at the bottom of the pot to keep it from leaking dirt into the saucer. Replace the cloth when you transplant the tree, so you do not clog the hole.

**Buy a slightly acidic potting mix for your tree.** Lemon trees grow well in peat moss mix because it is mildly acidic and well-draining. Buy it or another acidic, well-draining soil mix from a nearby garden center or plant nursery.

- Soils meant for cacti will also work well for citrus trees.

**You will need a sunny spot for your lemon tree to grow.** Lemon trees grow best when they have at least 8-12 hours of direct sunlight. Choose a spot by a window where your plant will get direct sunlight all day.

- If you are in a location that does not get a lot of sun, set up a grow light near the plant and leave it on for up to 12 hours a day.

**Take the lemon tree out of its nursery pot and spread its roots.** Massage the roots with your fingers, gently pulling them apart with your hands. This will help its roots spread faster and get more nutrients and water from the soil. Pull carefully to avoid damaging or breaking off the roots

**Fill the pot halfway with soil mix.** Before planting your lemon tree, add about one-half of the soil mix to your pot and smooth it over until even, then add the tree and spread any roots out to have room to grow.

**Place the lemon tree in the container.** Position it upright in the pot and fill the rest of the pot with soil. Press the soil around the plant's base downward, making sure that no roots are left exposed and out of the soil. Bury the tree at the same level as it was in the old pot.

- Avoid covering the trunk with soil, as this can cause fungal infections.

**Water your tree immediately after planting it.** Moistening the soil will help make it more habitable for your plant as it adapts. Water the tree until the soil is damp but not soaked or waterlogged.

**Water your lemon tree weekly.** If your lemon tree does not get enough water, the natural salts that it produces

may accumulate in the soil. Keep the soil moist but not waterlogged to prevent root rot. If using hard tap water, you may need to drop the water's pH before giving it to your tree. Adding one tablespoon (15 milliliters) of white vinegar to one gallon (4 liters) of water will usually do the trick.

- If your tree's leaves are curling, your tree needs more water.

**Keep the air around your plant circulated.** To imitate outdoor conditions, open a door or window near your plant in warm weather. If the air is too cold, set up a rotating fan near the lemon tree to help the air stay well-ventilated.

**Fertilize your plant once every few months.** Lemon trees grow well if they have sufficient nitrogen—you can find nitrogen-rich fertilizers at most plant stores. Feed your plant once every 3 weeks in spring or summer and once every 6 weeks (about 1 and a half months) in fall and winter.

- An NPK fertilizer of 2-1-1 works well for citrus trees. Do not use fertilizers containing alfalfa meal or cottonseed meal. Fertilizers containing these meals can cause fungal diseases.

**Perform only mild pruning on your tree.** Pruning too many leaves will reduce your yield, but occasional pruning can be helpful. Remove dead, broken, and diseased branches, and thin to control the height and spread of your tree as space allows.

- Lemon trees can be pruned year-round when grown indoors.

**Set up a humidifier near your lemon plant.** Lemon trees grow in humid climates. If you have a place to put a humidifier near the tree, you can keep the air from getting too warm with this method and allow the tree to have cool air. Set the humidifier to at least 50% to give your plant enough moisture in the air. If you do not have a humidifier, try misting your lemon tree with water several times a week, or when it rains you can also restore the plant's humidity levels.

- If you live in a humid location, you may be able to get enough humidity from opening a door or window.

**Manage the temperature of your room to ensure a healthy harvest.** These trees do best in rooms with an average temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit (21 degrees Celsius) by day and 55 degrees Fahrenheit (12.8 degrees Celsius) at night. While temperatures that dip below 55 degrees Fahrenheit (12.8 degrees Celsius) will not kill your tree, they will cause your tree to go into dormancy and stop growing.

**Pollinate with a paintbrush.** Because your tree will not have insects to spread its pollen around, you will need to pollinate the plant manually for it to grow fruit. Rub a paintbrush against the plant's stamen and anthers, the pollen-covered buds around the middle of the plant's flowers. Transfer the pollen to the pistil, the bulb located deep in the center of the flower. Repeat this process once a day to ensure pollination. Most lemon trees take 6-9 months to harvest after being successfully pollinated. Sometimes the tree will self-pollinate.

**Thin out any heavy lemon clusters that grow.** Once a cluster of small lemons appears on your tree, remove 2/3 of them to allow the remaining 1/3 a chance to grow large. Snip away the extra lemons with pruning shears, cutting carefully at the stalk.

- Too many lemon clusters can drain your tree of energy and stunt all the fruits' growth. Many trees will drop fruit on their own. It is advised that you allow the fruit to ripen before removing the fruit.

**Cut your lemons from the tree with pruning shears.** Take the pruning shears and clip them off the tree at the fruit stalk. If you do not have pruning shears, you can also carefully pull the lemon from the tree. Pull or cut gently to prevent damaging your plant.

**Store your lemons on your kitchen counter or in your fridge.** After harvesting your lemons, you can store them for 2-4 weeks on a counter and 1-2 months in a refrigerator. Avoid cutting your lemons until you are ready to use them, as cut lemons only last for 2-3 days in a fridge.

If you want to store your lemons longer, squeeze the juice and store them in an airtight container for 4-6 months in a fridge or freezer.





**Prune your plant's roots if it stops producing lemons.** Your tree should remain root-bound to keep its size in check. Your potted lemon trees may stop producing fruit if their roots get too pot bound. Remove your tree from its pot and use a sharp knife to shave 1/2-inch to 1-inch (1.27 to 2.5 centimeters) of the roots around the exterior of the root ball. Repot the tree and prune approximately 1/3 of its foliage to balance out the pruned roots.

- Keep the roots moist while you work by spritzing them with water from a spray bottle.

#### References:

<https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/citrus/lemons.htm>

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/fact-sheets/citrus/>

<https://practicalselfreliance.com/growing-lemon-trees-from-seed/>

<https://www.nature-and-garden.com/gardening/potted-lemon-tree.html>

## Meyer Lemon Pasta

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 12 minutes

Total Time: 32 minutes

### INGREDIENTS

1 pound/457 g spaghetti or fetachini

1 clove garlic, for rubbing

2 lemons (zest of 1 lemon, juice of 2 lemons)

5 tablespoons/74 ml good extra-virgin olive oil

Salt to taste

1 cup/235 ml finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, plus extra for sprinkling

Large Bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley, leaves picked and chopped



### INSTRUCTIONS

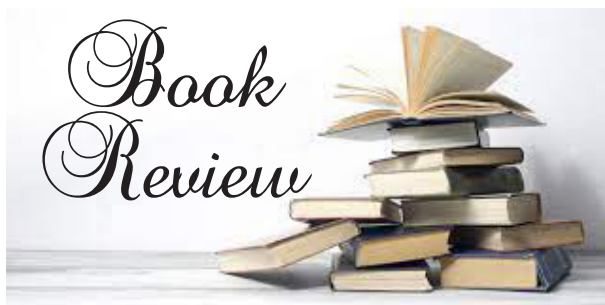
Place the pasta in a pot of boiling salted water and stir immediately to prevent the strands from sticking. Cook the pasta to “al dente”.

Cut the garlic in half and rub the exposed area along the interior of a large serving bowl. The raw garlic flavor will coat the inside surface of the serving bowl. Discard the garlic. Add the freshly squeezed lemon juice and slowly drizzle in extra-virgin olive oil while whisking. Whisk until the ingredients have emulsified. Mix in the salt and Parmigiano cheese.

When the pasta is ‘al dente’, drain and add to the serving bowl.

Mix the pasta with the lemon sauce to coat evenly. Sprinkle the pasta dish with Parmigiano cheese, fresh parsley and lemon zest. Serve immediately.

## Book Review



## The Signature of All Things

by Melanie Wallace, ECMG Intern

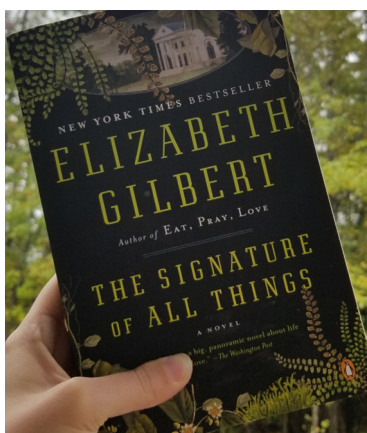
While there are hundreds of wonderful nonfiction gardening books on the market (and my bookshelf is filling up with these at a fast rate), I was surprised to scroll through my reading journal to find that gardening is a theme explored in many of my

favorite novels. While my conscious interest in gardening didn't start until a couple of years ago, my 60+ year history of reading points to a long-held love of the garden...starting, as many of you probably did, with *The Secret Garden*.

It only makes sense that we find gardening in the pages of so many novels after a study of the lives of our most famous and prolific authors. Writers such as Eudora Welty, Beatrix Potter, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and even William Shakespeare were all avid gardeners, finding inspiration for their work and, indeed, their lives, in the sanctuary of their gardens.

One of my favorite novels of late is *The Signature of All Things* by Elizabeth Gilbert (of *Eat, Pray, Love* fame). With the financial freedom provided her by the huge commercial success of *Eat, Pray, Love*, Gilbert was able to devote herself entirely to a four-year-long deep dive into botany and lifestyle in nineteenth century Philadelphia.

Gilbert started this book because she wanted to write about plants and about the role of women in science in the 1800s, for whom botany was the only discipline open for study. Gilbert explained in an article in *The New York Times*, "They (women) kind of snuck into botany through the garden gate, and made real contributions."



The story follows Alma Whittaker, the daughter of a famous (fictional) botanical explorer. Through Alma, we are made privy to the science of mosses. In the novel, Alma spends her entire life studying moss, discovering the important role that mosses play here on Earth. Her study ultimately leads her to a deeper exploration of the mysteries of evolution.

Though I am certainly no expert, my own research tells me that mosses and lichens are the first organisms to colonize rocks, breaking them down and preparing the substrate for growth of higher order plants. Additionally, mosses have excellent air-cleaning capabilities and are considered one of nature's "best air filters."

For we plantsmen (and plantswomen...*plantpersons*?) Elizabeth Gilbert's *The Signature of All Things* offers a fascinating look into the lives of extraordinary women in the nineteenth century. So, as April showers turn into May flowers...and the Texas heat sneaks up on us in the coming months, take some time out of your own garden to look into this extraordinary work of historical fiction. I think you'll find it worth the investment of 500+ pages of good reading.

If this book inspires you, take a look at **Oak Spring Garden Foundation's** site:

<https://www.osgf.org/blog/2020/3/4/historys-greatest-women-botanists>.

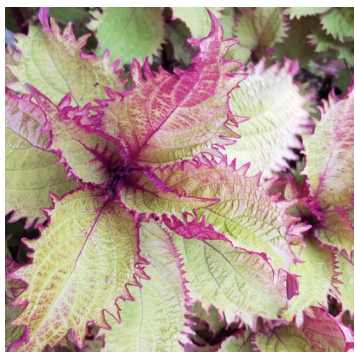
This site offers some great information on six noted women botanists.



# COLEUS

(Plectranthus scutellarioides)

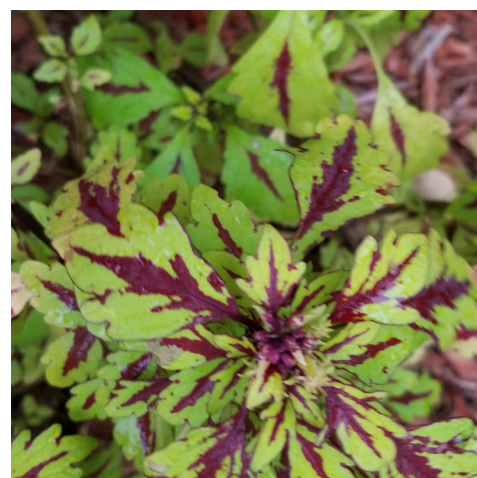
Sharon McIver, ECMG



Coleus is a tropical evergreen that most likely originated in Southeast Asia or Malasia. It is a member of the mint family (Lamiaceae) and is closely related to spearmint, peppermint, basil, and thyme. The plant was named by Dutch botanist, Karl Ludwig Blume who discovered it in the Dutch colony of Java in the early 1800's. Dutch traders transported it throughout Europe where it quickly gained popularity in Victorian households due to its vibrant colors and ease of

cultivation. Today, coleus is widely enjoyed as a container plant, though it also adapts well in our southern landscapes. The plant is available in a wide selection of colors and leaf shapes. Thus, it provides a visually pleasing addition to landscapes.

Some species of coleus have been known for their medicinal value. Coleus derivatives have been used to treat various conditions such as heart disease, convulsions, and respiratory disorders as well as multiple other ailments.



In an outdoor setting, coleus prefers shade to part shade, though some varieties are sun tolerant. Heights range from one to about three feet depending on the variety and soil conditions. Plants should be spaced 12-24 inches apart again depending on the variety. Plant in beds in early spring after all danger of frost has passed. Soil should be well-drained and rich in nutrients. Keep plants moist. Do not over-water. Coleus is extremely easy to grow from cuttings, so plants can be saved from year to year.

For additional information, visit

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>

<https://web.extension.illinois.edu>

<http://www.medicalhealthguide.com/herb/coleus.htm>

## References:

[www.centraltexasgardener.org/resource/texas-coleus](http://www.centraltexasgardener.org/resource/texas-coleus)

[www.medicalhealthguide.com/herb/coleus.htm](http://www.medicalhealthguide.com/herb/coleus.htm)

<https://extension.umn.edu/flowers/coleus>



# Blackland Prairie Plants

by Maureen Nitkowski, ECMG

Before Ellis County came into existence the prairie here was alive with plants and animals. The native peoples recognized the utility of many of the plants as did European settlers who found similar uses for the flora. Today we invest in many non-native plants and hybrids that we install for beauty as well as for practical purposes such as food, while tending to forget about the plants that have been here all along. Perhaps it is time to consider using native plants once again.

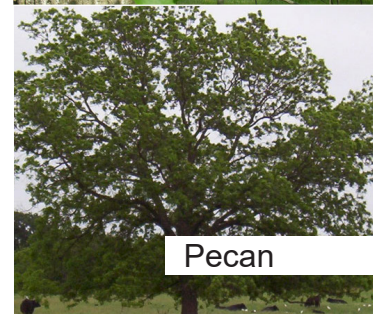
A prairie is not expected to have many trees growing as would a forest, but where there is sufficient water in streams or close to the surface, there are trees such as cottonwood, pecan, Osage orange (also known as Bois d'Arc), Mexican plum and shrubs such as yaupon and soapberry.

- A cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*) was a sure sign of water near the surface plus shade for a weary traveler. Its wood was used for beams as well as for pulp, and it provided a haven for many creatures.
- The pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) has been an excellent food, since it is composed of 9.5% protein, 73.7% fat (no cholesterol!) and 12.7% carbohydrate and stores easily.
- Bois d'Arc (*Maclura pomifera*), which translates as "wood of the bow" was prized for use in making bows and later for fences and pier and beam construction in houses, since the wood is very slow to decay.
- The Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*) is a small tree which blooms early in the spring and provides a favorite for pollinators.
- Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) is still used in many landscapes and is sometimes trained in weeping or topiary forms. Yaupon is native to Ellis County, and its dried leaves were used for tea by both native peoples and settlers. The tea, which does contain caffeine, was supplanted by the Oriental teas as they were heavily marketed and available.
- Soapberry (*Sapindus drummondii*, also *Saponaria*) is a clump-forming large shrub that has golden autumn color and berries which contain 37% saponin, which is a surfactant. The berries can be crushed to make soap, and the seeds were used as beads in jewelry.

Not everyone has room for a large tree or shrub in their landscape, but just about everyone can find a place for a native bunch grass such as little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) which is one of the best forage grasses as well as adding color and movement in a design.



Cottonwood



Pecan



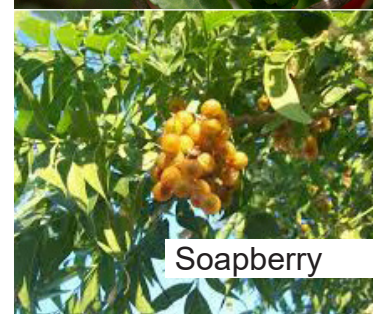
Bois d'Arc



Mexican Plum



Yaupon Holly



Soapberry



Native wildflowers are easy to grow from seed and will reseed for the following year.

- Indian blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*) and horsemint (*Monarda* sp.) bring color and food for pollinators. Honeybees feeding on Indian blanket produce an especially tasty honey while *Monarda* contains citronella, which can be used as an insect repellent.
- Purple coneflower (*Echinacea* sp.) is a perennial which is easy to establish from seed or plants. Various parts of this plant have been used to treat burns, insect bites, sore throats and coughs.
- Prickly pear (*Opuntia* sp.) has been used for food, for water purification, and is a host for a scale insect which is crushed to make a red dye still used today.

Native plants of the Blackland Prairie are beautiful, durable, and part of the human history of the region. They can give your landscape a true sense of place.

#### References:

*Range Plants of North Central Texas*, Ricky Linex

*Texas Trees: a Friendly Guide*, Paul W. Cox and Patty Leslie

*Remarkable Plants of Texas: Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives*, Matt Warnock Turner



Indian  
Paintbrush



Purple  
Cone Flower



Prickly Pear

## Master Gardener's Around Town

Workday spreading mulch at Ridgeview Park, Midlothian





# Ergonomics in Gardening: An Ounce of Prevention is worth 10 pounds of dirt and compost!

by Beth Norris, ECMG

This is the time of year our gardening enthusiasts look forward to! Trees are budding, lawns are greening, we look at our winterized gardens and start planning what we will plant this year. Before we start heading off to our garden centers to hoist heavy bags of soil, compost, fertilizer and all the other various and sundry items we need, let's focus on some healthy gardening tips to protect our most important tool: our body!

No argument about the fact that gardening is great for our bodies and our minds, but one thing we have learned from the "weekend warrior" syndrome is that too much/too fast on a body that has softened over the winter is not a good thing. When we think about a gym workout, we usually think about a gradual 5-10 minute warm up prior to an aerobic or body building routine. Maybe we need to think of our gardens as a gym and allow ourselves a chance to warm up and advance from there before taking on more than we should. As always: before starting any work out or exercise routine, check with your primary care physician to be sure you are cleared to take on any strenuous activity.

Of course, the best prevention is planning a garden around your own physical limitations. Raised beds or vertical/elevated gardens can decrease the amount of bending over or getting on your knees at all.



You can even try container gardening where many plants, flowers, and vegetables can be raised in containers positioned higher off the ground for easier planting and harvesting.

If you do decide to go the more typical gardening route, be sure to use the proper tools to create and maintain your garden. Tools that are used while standing for weeding or thinning are better than those that require you to get down on your knees and bend at the waist. Many Master Gardeners prefer a Cobra Head weeding tool that requires only moderate bending over to use and achieve optimal results.

Plan your time for gardening ahead and have knee pads ready or a carpet swatch or old rug to kneel on. Select areas to work on in groups and kneel so that you are halfway from one area to weed and another. This way you do not have to get up and move as often and can still maintain proper body mechanics while you work a specific area. Follow guidelines for proper body mechanics and warm-up exercises in the links below.

[https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ergonomics\\_tips\\_for\\_gardening\\_at\\_home.pdf](https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ergonomics_tips_for_gardening_at_home.pdf)



The link below will provide additional tips and information for proper body mechanics with gardening:

<https://www.solutionsnw.com/2020/06/19/how-to-use-proper-ergonomics-while-gardening/>

One of the most overlooked tips for preventing physical injury while gardening is to schedule breaks in between garden activities. Many experts recommend taking a break every half hour or so. Do not forget to hydrate while you work! Remember to drink before you get thirsty. And we should not forget about sun protection. Wearing sunscreen and a proper sun hat or visor is a must.

Gardening should be an enjoyable activity that provides mental and physical well being and not a painful experience. Taking a few easy precautions and wise body awareness actions ahead of time can go a long way to prevent any injury that takes away from this positive hobby!!



## Rocking the World of Garden Art!

Just when you thought you had seen it all! These rock trucks were built by stone mason, Chris Miller of Vermont. The first truck was built near his home in 2012, the second, built in 2020, is in front of a carwash in Georgia.

