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## Waxahachie Farmers Market Opens for 2023!

**May 6** – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – May is **Healthy Soil Month** at the Master Gardener Booth. Learn all about *Soil Testing* and get a soil testing kit you can fill and send to A&M AgriLife to be analyzed. Indian Trail Master Naturalists will also be on hand to discuss the composition of soils we have in Ellis County.

**May 13** – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – Learn methods of *Garden Preparation*. Whether you are growing pretty flowers or vegetables, we can help you with techniques to get your soil ready to produce wonders.

**May 20** – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – Build Healthy Soil with *Compost!* Learn how and what to compost and how compost can help you build wonderful soil.

**May 27** – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – Once you have good soil, how do you keep it that way? Learn about *Maintaining Soil* to keep your garden soil healthy and productive.

### Contact Us:

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image design by Dottie Love

## PLANTING

- Plant heat-loving annuals including copper plant, firebush, gomphrena, lantana, pentas, purple fountain grass and ornamental sweet potato in sunny areas.
- In shady spots, plant caladiums, begonias, coleus, impatiens (mildew-resistant types). Seeds of celosia, cosmos, marigold, morning glory, portulaca, and zinnia can be sown directly in the beds. Keep the seeded area moist until seeds germinate.
- Achimenes, cannas, dahlias and other summer flowering bulbs can be planted now.
- Establish new lawns before summer heat sets in. Sow seeded varieties of Bermuda grass early in the month, or sod Bermuda or St. Augustine grass. Water daily for the first few weeks to develop a good root system.

## FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

- Feed fruit trees, perennials, annuals, ground covers and vines with a lawn fertilizer (3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratio).
- Fertilize tomatoes and most other vegetables every other week for productive and vigorous plants.
- Manually thin the fruit on peaches, pears, plums, and apples to 5-6 inches apart early in the month.
- Prune spring-flowering shrubs and vines soon after flowering. Keep the natural shape of the plant in mind as you prune and avoid excessive cutting except where necessary to control size. Deadhead roses and other reblooming plants.
- Allow foliage of daffodils and other spring-flowering bulbs to mature and yellow before removing.

## GARDEN WATCH

- Allow bluebonnets and other reseeding annual wildflowers to die and the seeds to dry before mowing the stubble. Delay mowing until the end of the growing season if other wildflowers are growing in the area.
- Check tomatoes for signs of early blight (yellow blotches on lower leaves). Apply a labeled fungicide if needed. Keep soil adequately moist to prevent blossom-end-rot (browned tissue on the bloom end of fruit).
- Look for squash bugs in early morning. Destroy eggs found on underside of leaves by hand. Vegetable pests can often be controlled by mechanical, biological, or organic means rather than by synthetic pesticides.
- Watch for bagworms on junipers and other narrow-leafed evergreens. Apply Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) or general insecticide at first sign of larval feeding. Remember that once the bag has formed, your only option is to manually pull them off.
- Make initial application of Image® or SledgeHammer® to control nutsedge in established warm-season lawns.



by Lea Sandoz, ECMG

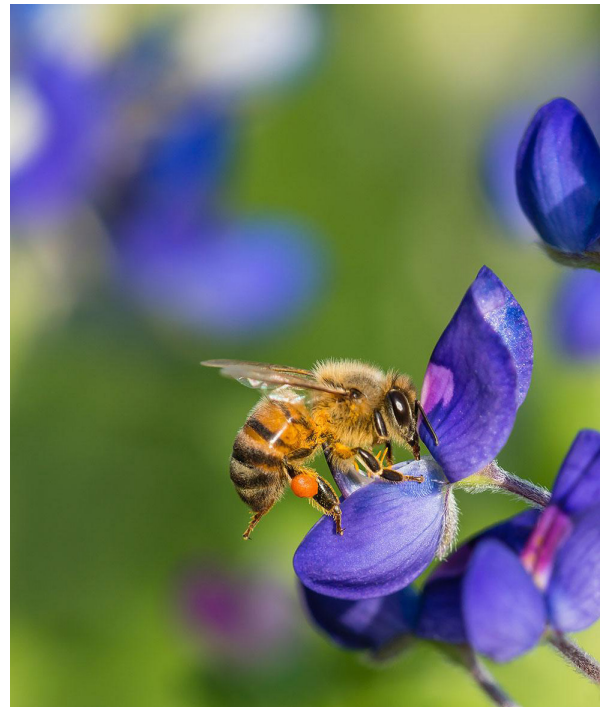
### Just a few fun facts about these amazing little creatures!

There are 20,000 species of bees worldwide. Out of 4,000 bee species native to North America, 800-1000 have been identified in Texas.

Seventy percent of the world's 20,000 bee species live largely solitary lives and lay eggs in underground nests or colonies.

Bees can fly between 6 and 30 miles per hour (MPH). The speed at which bees fly can vary based on the species or type of bee, with honey bees having an average flight speed ranging from 12 and 20 mph. Bumblebee flight speed ranges 6.7-10.7 mph

Bees are cold-blooded. Bees heat and cool their own hive to keep it between 93 and 95 degrees.



FOUR  
THOUSAND  
HONEY BEES  
TOGETHER  
WEIGH ONLY  
ONE POUND.

**Honey bees:** A single honey bee weighs .00025 oz. Four thousand honey bees together weigh only one pound. On average a worker bee will produce 1/12th of a teaspoon of honey in its lifetime. A queen bee will lay 800,000 eggs in her lifetime. A bee's diet consists of pollen and honey. The queen bee eats a special blend of pollen and honey called royal jelly. The added carbohydrates give her size and fertility.

**Bumble bees** weigh between .005 and .007 ounces each. Because of their size, they are useful for crops that benefit from buzz pollination (see below) Nesting sites include clumps of dry grass, old bird nests, abandoned rodent burrows, old mattresses, car cushions or even in or under old abandoned buildings. Most colonies contain a few hundred bees although thriving colonies can contain up to 2,000 bees. Nests may be up to 12 inches in diameter and may have several entrances. Foraging worker bees use long tongues to pollinate clovers and other flowers,

**Carpenter bees** These bees don't eat wood – they eat nectar. They make their nests in wood, preferring unfinished softwoods such as redwood, cypress, cedar and pine in structures for constructing nests. Adult female carpenter bees can sting but usually only if aggressively disturbed; most carpenter bees "attacking" people passing by nesting sites are territorial males incapable of stinging,

**Bees like caffeine-** It may help them pollinate more quickly and efficiently. But apiologists (bee scientists) have determined that caffeine also caused confusion among bees. The bees were more likely to rank caffeine-laced nectar as a better food source, even though it has no nutritional benefits over plain nectar.

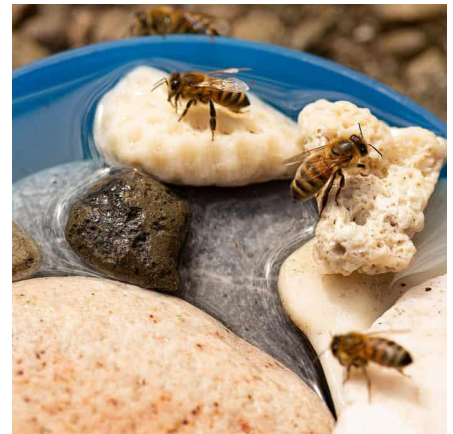
**Buzz Pollination:** Some crops, including blueberries, cranberries, tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and



potatoes, contain their pollen in poricidal anthers located inside of long narrow flowers with only small pores through which pollen is released. Approximately eight percent or 300,000 species of flowering plants have poricidal anthers (Buchmann, 1985). To obtain this closely held pollen, insects have to shake the anthers in a process called **buzz pollination** or sonification.

## BE BEE FRIENDLY

1. Plant a Bee Garden - By planting a bee garden, you can create a habitat with plants that are rich in pollen and nectar. You don't need lots of space to grow bee-friendly plants — gardens can be established across yards and in window boxes, flower pots, and planters.
2. Go Chemical-Free for Bees - Synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, and neonicotinoids are harmful to bees, wreaking havoc on their sensitive systems. Avoid treating your garden and green spaces with synthetics. Use organic products and natural solutions such as compost to aid soil health and adding beneficial insects that keep pests away like ladybugs and praying mantises.
3. Become a Citizen Scientist -Join a global movement to collect data. Gather photos and other information about native bees and upload them to the iNaturalist app.
4. Provide Trees for Bees - Bees get most of their nectar from trees. When a tree blooms, it provides hundreds — if not thousands — of blossoms to feed from. Trees are not only a great food source for bees, but also an essential habitat. Tree leaves and resin provide nesting material for bees, while natural wood cavities make excellent shelters.
5. Create a Bee Bath -Bees work up quite a thirst foraging and collecting nectar. Fill a shallow bird bath or bowl with clean water, and arrange pebbles and stones inside so that they break the water's surface. Bees will land on the stones and pebbles to drink.
6. Build Homes for Native Bees -With the exception of honeybees, most bees are solitary creatures. 70% of solitary bees live underground, while 30% live in holes inside of trees or hollow stems. Species like bumble bees build their nests in undisturbed land, and you can provide safe haven for them by leaving an untouched plot of land for them in your garden. "Bee condos" — which have small tube "apartments" — allow species like mason bees to take up residence.



<http://texasinsects.tamu.edu/#hymenoptera>  
<http://w3.biosci.utexas.edu/jha/about-native-bees>  
<https://www.Honeybeehobbyist.com>  
<https://www.bumblebee.org/>  
<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/blog/bumblebee-fact-sheet/>  
<https://www.bigislandbees.com>  
<https://www.interestingfacts.com>  
<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/blog/bumblebee-fact-sheet/>  
<https://animals.mom.com/difference-between-nest-hive-8876.html>  
<http://drbeekeeper.com/2017/03/many-bees-take-produce-teaspoon-honey/>

# 2023 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

by Susan Knapp, ECMG

***Did you know that Ellis County Master Gardeners along with our annual Expo Sponsors provide scholarships for Ellis County High School Seniors?***

Within the past 20 years, we have provided \$106,100 in scholarships. These scholarships go to deserving students who will pursue studies in horticulture or related life sciences including agriculture and water and soil conservation. In addition to high school seniors, previous scholarship winners are eligible to reapply annually.

***The competition this year was tough but we had three outstanding winners!***

**Brayden DeBorde** (a previous scholarship winner) received the Monty Gerner Memorial Scholarship for \$3,000. Brayden will begin his third year at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas with a major in Agriculture Applied Economics and Agriculture Business. Brayden has a proven track record of success with many honors related to ranching as well as water and soil conservation. He has worked and studied his entire life on the family farm in Bardwell.

**John Michael Volentine**, Waxahachie High School senior received the Jim Dockins Memorial Scholarship for \$2,500. John Michael has a passion for the agriculture industry and hopes to become a Texas County Extension Agent. He is a strong advocate for agriculture and will pursue a degree in agriculture and education. John Michael will attend Blinn College in the Fall 2023 with plans to transfer to Texas A & M to complete his degree.

**Macie Wimbish**, Heritage High School Midlothian senior received a \$2,500 scholarship. Macie will attend Texas A & M at College Station this Fall and plans to pursue a degree in Agriculture Life Science. Macie has participated in this field, with her family, since she was eight years old and is a strong supporter of youth in 4-H and FFA. She is an extraordinary advocate for "our land, our water and our Texas way of life."

We are very proud of these deserving scholarship winners and want the community to celebrate with us. Many thanks to the Ellis County Lawn and Garden Expo Sponsors!



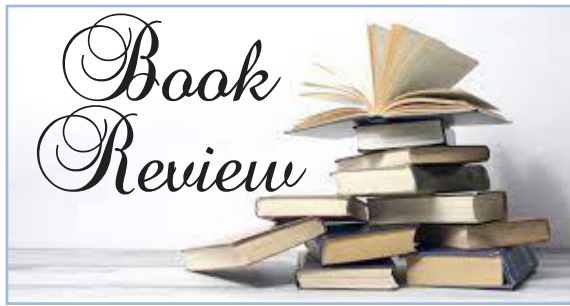
**Brayden DeBorde**



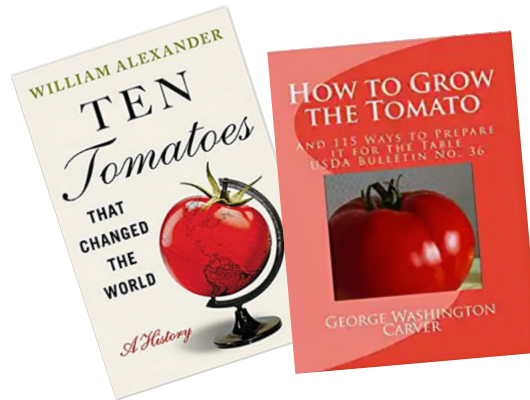
**John Michael Volentine**



**Macie Wimbish**



by Melanie Wallace, ECMG



"It's difficult to think anything but pleasant thoughts while eating a homegrown tomato."

*Lewis Grizzard, Southern author*

Since I am a new gardener, I doubt that there is anything I can tell you about growing tomatoes that you don't already know. From the debate about seed or transplant to heirloom or hybrid, there's enough literature to paper the trail from here to the Andes Mountains of South America (which, by the way is where this luscious treat is fabled to have originated).

A graduate of the 2022 class of Ellis County Master Gardeners, I did a deep dive on the tomato topic back in the winter. While I am, of course, interested in the gardening aspects of tomatoes, my truest interest lies in the culinary outcome of said orb. I crack myself up (daily, when inspecting and talking to my tomato plants, waiting for the first sign of fruiting) reciting the litany of tomato dishes that I love (a la Forrest Gump). Fried green tomatoes, marinara sauce, tomato chutney, tomato and basil soup, tomato pie, salsa, bruschetta, pizza, lasagne, meatballs in tomato sauce, tomato fritters, tomato jam...well, you get the idea. I could go on and on.

And, I love them all.

My Daddy had a garden for many years, and one of my favorite memories is him taking a salt shaker right out into the garden, picking a ripe one, and moaning as he tasted the first tomato of summer each year. At the time, I was not a garden enthusiast. In fact, I am sorry to reveal that I was a little bit embarrassed about the garden that he dug in the backyard of our upscale suburban Plano home. Where neighbors installed swimming pools and tennis courts, we had a vegetable garden. Good grief, what would people think?

Well, I'm older now (much) and since our back yard is in complete shade, I planted my tomatoes right smack in the front yard. Interesting how a little age and life experience can shift your view of the world. I'm guessing that our young neighbors consider it a charming throw-back to my (now-grey-headed) childhood.

Part of my deep-dive into tomatoes this winter resulted in the purchase of two interesting books on the topic. William Alexander's ***Ten Tomatoes that Changed the World*** and a delightful USDA Bulletin, written by George Washington Carver (of peanut fame) entitled ***How to Grow the Tomato and 115 Ways to Prepare it For the Table*** (USDA Bulletin No. 36). Who knew?

Alexander's book gives us a whirlwind tour of the tomato's influence on global cuisine and culture. Its blend of history, botany, memoir, and travelogue makes it a wonderful read for gardeners and cooks alike. The book explores the history of tomatoes - from the Aztecs to the Italians and on



to our current heirloom mania. Since many of the Master Gardeners I've met this year have widespread interests in gardening, the culinary arts, reading, and history, I believe that this book is a win.

As an old history teacher, I have long been aware of the influence of George Washington Carver on agriculture in the United States. Little did I know that his expertise went far beyond the peanut. In his USDA Bulletin, published in 1918, Carver begins by saying, "...but few people realize what an important vegetable the tomato is. While it is true that chemical analysis does not place it very high in the nutritive scale, if viewed from this angle alone, its real value will be greatly underestimated." He then says, "For the reasons which follow, every normal person should make the tomato a very prominent part of the weekly diet." Then, he goes on to extoll the virtues of the tomato as a cash crop, for its medicinal qualities, and for its wide culinary appeal. He talks about soil preparation, fertilization, cultivation, and disease prevention. He then offers 115 old-fashioned, down-home tomato recipes. The publication itself is an exact reprinting, intended to perfectly reproduce the original edition. It is a delight. I plan to work my way through the recipes when my bumper crop comes in.

So, as I wait impatiently for the first of my tomatoes (grown from seed, I might add) to appear, I will continue to dream of the culinary delights I will prepare in early summer. And, I hope to hear some of your tomato tales as well.



## EPIC TOMATO PIE

### Ingredients:

1 9 inch pie crust (fully baked)  
4 tomatoes, sliced  
10 basil leaves (chiffonade) More for garnish  
1 cup grated mozzarella  
1 cup grated parmesan  
1 cup mayonnaise  
1 cup goat cheese  
salt/pepper

### Instructions:

***Preheat oven to 350 degrees.***

Placed sliced tomatoes in a colander and generously salt them (to remove excess moisture). Let them drain for 15-20 minutes.

Remove from colander, rinse, and pat dry with paper towels.

In a separate bowl, mix mayonnaise with mozzarella and Parmesan.



Layer tomatoes, basil, goat cheese, salt and pepper on the baked pie crust.

Top with mayonnaise/cheese mixture and spread evenly, completely covering the tomatoes.

Bake at 350 degrees until lightly browned. 20-25 minutes.

Cut into wedges and garnish with basil.



by Donna Summerlin, ECMG Intern

Dieticians tell us that eating leafy greens contributes to good health. However, purchasing salad greens at the grocery store can be expensive and the greens are sometimes not very fresh, even before the use-by date. These greens also may have been grown or washed with harmful chemicals. In order to avoid the expense and to ensure optimal food safety and freshness, I began growing my own salad greens to make flavorful and nutritious salads. Believe it or not, my family devours the salads made using my homegrown greens and frequently asks for seconds (and sometimes thirds)!

I find that growing baby salad greens to be most rewarding, since they are tender and bite-sized and can be harvested in a relatively short time after planting. Seeds for planting baby salad greens can be found in garden stores or on-line retailers and a packet containing all the seeds needed for months of harvests costs between \$2 and \$5. The lettuce I prefer is an organic mix containing many different types of lettuce and greens, including 'Red Salad Bowl' lettuce, 'Tango' lettuce, 'Black Seeded Simpson' lettuce, arugula, and green endive. I also plant a mix of kale seeds that contains 'Dwarf Blue Curled', "Dwarf Siberian Improved", "Nero Toscana" Lacinato, and 'Red Russian' kale. These seed mixes provide a variety of colors, textures, sizes and flavors.

To grow your own baby salad greens, follow the steps below:

### **Soil Preparation**

Lettuce, kale and spinach seeds germinate best when the soil temperature is between 65 and 75 degrees, which is in late winter or in the fall in Ellis County. Like most vegetables, salad greens need deep, well-draining and nutrient-rich soil and plenty of sunlight. I find that growing salad greens in a raised bed works best, since the soil where I live is shallow, alkaline, and rocky. Containers also work well for growing baby salad greens. Add slow-release fertilizer to the soil following package directions prior to planting to get the seedlings off to a good start and to continue feeding the growing plants.

### **Planting**

Although I find it's generally a good idea to follow the seed package directions in most cases, I deviate from the instructions when planting baby salad greens. Lettuce seed packets usually indicate that you should broadcast the seeds over the soil surface. Kale and spinach seed packets recommend spacing the seeds a few inches apart. Since the plants are harvested at a less mature stage, I find that planting the seeds close together in short rows about two feet long with about eight inches between the rows makes the leaves easier to harvest. To plant the seeds, press shallow furrows into the soil with your fingers and drop about 50 seeds into each furrow. Plant two or three furrows at a time and then another two or three furrows two weeks later to stagger harvest dates. Lettuce seeds are small, so they should be planted only about 1/8" deep while larger kale and spinach seeds should be planted 1/4" and 1/2" deep, respectively. After covering the seeds with soil, water gently and deeply to about six inches from the soil surface, being careful not to disturb the newly planted seeds.



## Maintaining the Plants

Seedlings will emerge approximately 5 – 10 days after the seeds have been planted. While the baby salad green plants are growing, they should receive water regularly. Water the plants every few days to keep them evenly moist, but not soggy if they haven't received adequate rain. Also, remove any weeds that appear so that they don't compete for water and nutrients. I find that there are seldom any pests growing on salad greens since they grow best in cooler temperatures when insects are less active. Any aphids found on the plant leaves can be washed away with a stream of water and other pests can be removed by hand.

## Harvesting

Approximately 30 days after planting (maybe a bit longer in cooler temperatures), the baby salad greens will be about six inches tall and large enough to harvest. Salad greens taste best when harvested early in the day when the cells of the leaves are fully hydrated. I find that it's easiest to use scissors to harvest the baby salad greens. Gently separate the rows of greens, gather a small bunch of leaves in one hand being careful not to crush the leaves, and cut the base of the gathered leaves with the other hand leaving approximately two inches of growth at the base of the plants. New leaves will grow from the cut plants and will be ready to harvest in a couple of weeks. Since salad greens are the most nutritious and flavorful soon after they're harvested, the amount you harvest will depend on the number of greens you will use in the next few days, but preferably that day. Unused salad greens can be stored in a plastic bag or container in the refrigerator for two or three days.

Here's a fast and delicious recipe that can be made using homegrown baby salad greens:

## ***Strawberry and Feta Spring Salad***

(Yield: 4 servings)

### **Ingredients**

#### **Salad:**

5 cups baby salad greens (equally good with baby lettuce, spinach or kale)  
1 ½ cups strawberries, sliced  
½ cup pecans or walnuts, chopped  
¼ cup feta, crumbled

#### **Dressing:**

¼ cup balsamic vinegar (I like to use flavored vinegars found in specialty shops)  
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil  
Small pinch salt  
Freshly ground pepper, to taste

### **Instructions**

Whisk all dressing ingredients together in a small bowl. Set aside.  
In a medium bowl add the baby salad greens, strawberries, pecans and feta cheese.  
Pour dressing over top and toss gently.



# Eastern Bluebird Houses

## If you build them, they will come.

By Jane Slone, ECMG

I am writing this article with the thought of what it would be like to have been an Ornithologist. That was a passion at one time, however very few Ornithologists are needed, so I decided it would be my hobby.

I have always wanted to have Bluebirds come to my garden. The first action to start this process was to build a place for water, food, and shelter that would attract bluebirds. My husband told me to not be disappointed if Bluebirds didn't come the first year.

Bluebirds are divided into several groups depending on their territory. In our area we primarily have Eastern Bluebirds.

I purchased a birdhouse and mounted it on a post so that the birds could come and go without human interference. The location of the wooden nest was based on information provided from my research indicating that they like semi-open areas such as forest clearings, farm country and even suburbs where there are extensive lawns and good nest sites. I did not place any type of material inside, so that the parents could arrange the nest themselves. I placed a water source that could be cleaned daily near by.

Food is important: Meal worms, suet, sunflower hearts, softened fruits, and cornmeal muffins can all be fed to bluebirds. Most of these will be accepted during the cold weather months if bluebirds have wintered over. But meal worms are their preferred food and they will readily eat them year-round.

Bluebirds often move away to other habitats in winter and return in the summer. You should clean and sanitize the nest after the birds leave. It is advised that you wear a mask, to prevent any parasites or debris from contaminating you. My birdhouse allows you to raise the front part and clean the nest. This is a great asset for both viewing, and cleaning.



*People who enjoy bird watching get overly excited when they see a bird they haven't viewed before.*

As mentioned, my husband said don't be disappointed if they don't come the first year, so, I was ready to wait. ...

HOWEVER, in less than an hour a mom came, made a nest, and days later had laid 3 eggs. Both parents took care of the babies. They were well cared for. The babies grew up and one day the birds took to the sky.

This was one of the greatest events that summer.



<https://txtbba.tamu.edu/species-accounts/eastern-bluebird/>

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/eastern-bluebird>

