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Calendar of Events

Oct 7 – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – It is prime time for fall bulbs, wildflower seeds and trees. Stop by our booth for ideas and how to get plantings off to a good start. Indian Trail Master Naturalists will be there with tree activities for children.

Oct 14 – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – **Cooler weather** is a good time for chores. Let's talk soil amendments and pruning!

Oct 21 – Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market – We will be giving out **Free trees** provided by the City of Waxahachie. Come for a tree and instructions

Oct 21 – 22 – Master Gardener Booth at **Ellis County Home and Garden Show** – Join us at the Ellis County Expo Center, 2300 US-287, from 10 am. to 6 pm. We can help plan for the coming gardening year!



What To Do In October

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 to have blooms next spring. Always purchase “fresh” seed.

Purchase spring-flowering bulbs while selection is good. Chill tulip and Dutch hyacinth at 45 degrees 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 degrees) Recommended daffodil varieties include Ice Follies, Fortune, Carlton, 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 pots to self-seed next year (cleome, cosmos, four o'clock).

Continue to feed tropical plants in containers and hanging baskets with a water-soluble fertilizer. Cut back or repot overgrown houseplants and fertilize with the 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 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 darkness at night for 30 days starting mid-month. And keep nighttime temperatures under 65 degrees.

SPARKPLUGS_ATHIKE

Tamra Boteler

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SPARKPLUGS_ATHIKE Posts

sparkplugs_athike On September 20th, 2023 I officially completed my thru-hike on the Appalachian Trail hiking 2198 miles from Springer, Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. I started my journey on the first day of Spring, March 20th in 17 degree weather (did I mention I have a fear of being freezing cold?!) and finished Sept 20th....184 days later. I was fortunate enough to have a great support system at home with friends and family; especially my husband who flew in to summit Mount Katahdin with me on the last day! Everything still feels very surreal and I suppose I will be processing this very challenging journey over the next month or so but what I can say now is that this has been one of the most difficult things I have done but also incredibly rewarding! I have experienced new insights, a deeper sense of Self, and a spiritual connection that has been renewed and flourishing in a way I could have never imagined. Lastly, I have been constantly reminded how good and caring people truly can be in this world! Although this world is not a perfect place, I do believe that humanity is good!

Thanks to all of you who have followed me on Instagram and followed me on Instagram and encouraged me along the way! I did not do this alone!

As always...."Further up, Further in."
Tamra (aka Sparkplug) 😊





Henry David Thoreau wrote: “I would rather sit on a pumpkin, and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.” While I may rather sit on a velvet cushion all to myself, if the only option was sitting on my own pumpkin, I might have to agree. If any of you faithfully planted your pumpkins this past May-June, it is time to start thinking about harvesting them!

You want to be sure to harvest your pumpkins before the first frost. For our warm Texas climate, the first frost is not usually before November-December. But we do know how unpredictable fall weather can be. If the weather has cooler rainy days before your pumpkins are ready for harvesting, you can lay straw or flattened cardboard underneath your gourds to protect them from rotting.

Knowing when your pumpkin is ready to harvest is as important as knowing when to plant them. Consider these factors before deciding when your pumpkins are ready: color, rind, stem and vine.

Color: You want to look for colors that “pop”. Depending on the variety, they can be orange, white, or grey. Don’t pick them if they are green, yellow, or somewhere in between.

Rind: A ripe pumpkin’s rind should be hard and shiny. You can feel the pumpkin for firmness; or you can thump/knock on them and check for a hollow sound. Another good test is the finger press test: press your finger on the rind and if it indents, it’s not ready to harvest.

Stem and Vine: Check the stem for thickness and firmness. Look to see if it's starting to shrivel off the vine. Those are good signs that the pumpkin is ready to break off the vine and be picked. If the leaves are brown and dried out, they're ready to be picked. Try to avoid yanking the pumpkin from a withering vine. Broken stems will rot faster, and you will be left with a potentially sharp/uneven edge that can lead to injury. The best way to remove the pumpkin from the vine is with a knife. Make a clean slice through the stem leaving 3-6 inches of the



stem attached. Cutting off the entire stem will lead to faster rotting. During the growing season, the stem provides water and nutrients to the pumpkin and there are still residual nutrients that will benefit the pumpkin after it has been cut from its vine. Avoid picking up the pumpkin by the stem. Their stems were not meant to support its weight and you could cause them to break off.

Be sure to wear a pair of good garden gloves to avoid annoying sticks. Pumpkin vines are covered in small needle like prickly stickers that allow them to attach to the ground or fences which provides support for them to grow. If possible, get a buddy to help you with this process. One person can hold the vine while the other cuts the

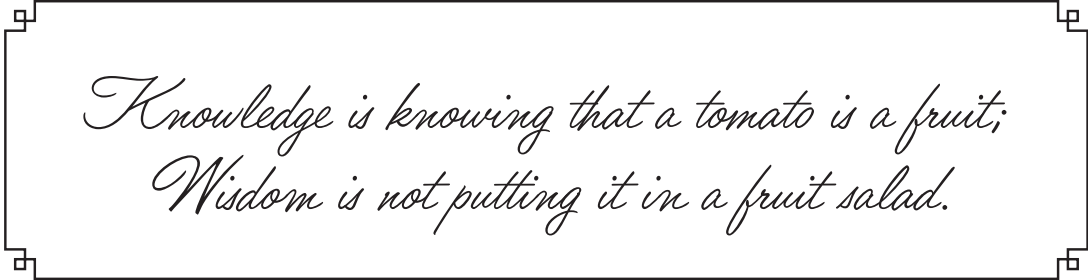
stem. This way the vine remains steady, and the pumpkin can rest on the ground during the cutting efforts.

Remember your gardening ergonomics: depending on how large your pumpkin is, be sure to lift with your legs and avoid bending your back. This little reminder can help avoid an unnecessary back strain. Once your pumpkins are picked, you can put them in your garden wagon or wheelbarrow and store them till ready to enjoy as a Halloween Jack-O-Lantern, pumpkin pie or roasted pumpkin seeds.

To store your pumpkins, wash and dry them thoroughly and wipe them down with a weak bleach solution to decrease chances of rot. Make the bleach solution by adding 2 tablespoons of bleach to 1 gallon of water. The pumpkins can be stored in a cool, dry, dark location. Lay the pumpkins in a single layer on bales of hay, cardboard, wooden shelves or wooden pellets. Avoid storing pumpkins on concrete as it can lead to rot. Properly stored pumpkins keep for 3-6 months.

Pumpkins can be eaten in a variety of ways. Pumpkin pulp can be pureed to make soup, risotto, ravioli, bars as well as pies. The seeds can be roasted and eaten. You can eat the outer shell of seeds, or you can peel the outer shell like you do with sunflower seeds.

And don't forget to take advantage of the photo opportunities from your own pumpkin patch! Despite the hard work and dedication to make your pumpkin patch a reality, you will be greatly rewarded!



*Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit;
Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.*

[Pumpkin Harvest](#)

[Pumpkin Soup](#)

[Roasting Pumpkin Seeds](#)

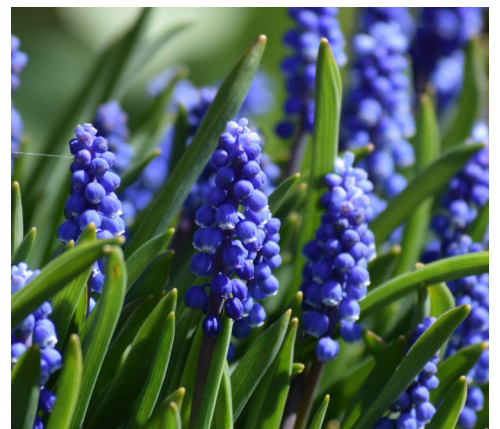


With a particularly harsh north Texas summer finally heaving its last hot breaths, we eagerly anticipate the welcome relief cooler fall days and nights are sure to bring. As crisp fall days drift into cold winter nights, we invariably begin to long once again for those gentle spring breezes. Our eager eyes search for signs of renewed life in our flower beds. A great way to ensure we are rewarded with vibrant pallets of spring color is by planting a variety of fall bulbs such as daffodils, lilies, and hyacinths to name a few.

Daffodils belong to the plant genus *Narcissus*. Colors include white, cream, yellows, oranges, pink and even light green. Plant the bulbs in early fall here in north Texas so the bulbs can have time to store nutrients prior to the first hard freeze. The ideal soil should be fertile and well-drained. Add compost and a small amount of bone meal to each hole and top with a light covering of soil. Daffodils should be planted no deeper than about one and a half times the width of the bulb. These perennial plants can be divided to prevent overcrowding and create more plants.



Grape Hyacinth (g. *Muscari*) is another perennial flowering bulb. It produces grass-like foliage and tiny bell-shaped flowers. Color choices for this little beauty include blue, white, pink, and yellow. Hyacinths prefer full sun to partial shade and tolerate a variety of soil types including clay, chalk, sandy or sandy loam with a neutral to acid pH. Plant these



bulbs 2-3 inches deep and about 3 inches apart in moist, well-drained soil. Again, these bulbs are best planted in the fall. Consider them for borders or rock gardens or as pollinators. They typically grow to about six inches tall and wide.

Lillies (g. Lilium) add delightful color to early and midsummer gardens.

These perennial flowers grown from bulbs require minimal care when planted in the right garden spot. The color pallet for them is quite extensive depending on the type of lily chosen. Early fall is an optimal time to plant garden lilies. Plant bulbs at a depth equal to 3 times their diameter. Most lilies perform best in well-drained slightly acidic soils in full sun. Make sure the soil has good drainage as lily bulbs tend to rot in poorly drained areas.



Mulching fall-planted lily bulbs with several inches of good quality mulch will delay their freezing and help the plant's roots to get more established.

Have fun planting!

References:

1. Jauron, Richard and Klein, Willy: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach -Yard and Garden: Planting Lilies, August 2019
2. North Carolina State Extension -Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox: Muscari Common Name Grape Hyacinth
3. Texas A&M Agrilife Extension -Aggie Horticulture: Ornamental Production-Daffodils



Fall is here and the weather has finally begun to cool, so now is the perfect time to plant some spring-blooming flowers. Ellis County is in the USDA Hardiness Zone 8, which means that the average low temperature is between 10°F and 20°F. Many plants that bloom in the spring prefer cool temperatures and can withstand the lowest winter temperatures in our area, making fall the best time to plant. If started in the spring, these flowering plants won't have time to mature before hot weather sets in and the plants begin to die back.

Listed below are a few of the flowering plants that may be sown in the coming weeks for springtime blooms (all photos shown below were taken in my backyard garden this past spring):

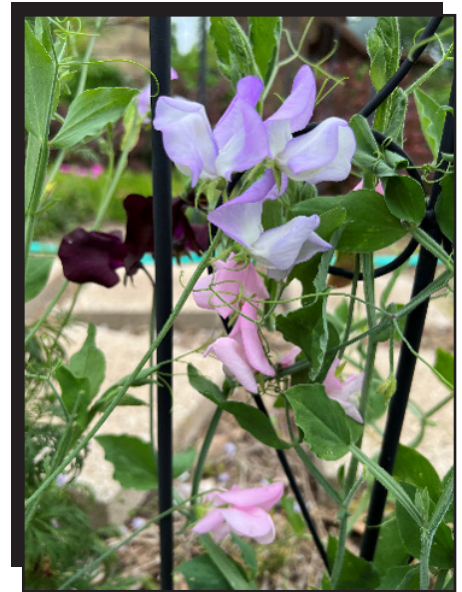
I. Ranunculus

Ranunculus is favored among flower lovers for its rounded blooms reminiscent of roses or peonies. The blooms are available in a wide variety of colors and are long-lasting cut flowers. Plant ranunculus in full sun and fertile, well-drained soil. Set corms with prongs down, one to two inches deep and six to eight inches apart, then water thoroughly. When flowering tapers off and leaves start to yellow, stop watering the plants and allow the foliage to die back. Garden experts suggest that the corms can be left undisturbed as long as the soil can be kept dry as soggy corms will rot, however, I have been digging mine up after the foliage dies back to prevent burrowing creatures from disturbing them. I then replant them at the end of October for spring blooms. Click link [Time to Plant Ranunculus](#) for additional information.



2. *Sweet Pea*

With their beautiful, ruffled blossoms and exquisite scent, sweet peas make a great addition to any flower garden. Sweet peas should be planted during the last two weeks of October for early spring blooms. Plant seeds in holes that are about two inches deep at a site with full to partial sun and rich soil that is moist but well-drained. Drop two to four seeds per hole, with holes spaced four to six inches apart. Water thoroughly and keep soil moist until the seeds have sprouted in about 10 to 21 days. When the seedlings are three to four inches high, thin them out, leaving the most vigorous-looking plants four to six inches apart. Sweet pea plants grow tall and should be planted next to a vertical support. Click link [Starting Sweet Peas from Seed](#) for more information.



3. *Poppy*

Another garden favorite, colorful annual poppies are both gorgeous and easy to grow. Just scatter the seeds over bare soil in full sun from now until late fall. Because poppy seeds are small, mixing them with sand helps separate the seeds for better spacing. Do not cover the seeds but press them into the soil gently as they need light to germinate, then keep the seed bed evenly moist. Germination will occur in about a week. More specifics about growing poppies are available by clicking link, [5 Keys to Growing Poppies Successfully](#).



4. *Larkspur*

Plant annual larkspur seeds in the fall to enjoy their feathery foliage and layers of delicate blooms on spiky stalks next spring. Larkspurs are ideally suited to Ellis County since they tolerate our alkaline soil. They require a sunny location and well-draining soil. Since seeds don't germinate well when temperatures are above 55°, plant them in late November to early December. For best results, cover seeds with ¼ inch of soil as darkness is required for germination and plant four to six inches apart. Click link [Larkspur](#) for additional details.



5. *Wildflower Seed Mix*

A great way to enjoy a variety of spring blooms with minimal effort is to sow a mix of wildflower seeds in the fall. Most wildflowers do best in full sun on a mostly level site that drains well. Clear any weeds, mulch, or debris away and rake lightly for good seed-to-soil contact. The site should be free of grass which will choke out the wildflower seedlings. Mixing wildflower seeds with sand makes it easier to distribute them as evenly as possible. Press the seed into the soil by walking or rolling over the newly planted area. It's a good idea to select a seed mix with several species of wildflowers since it's likely that not every type of flower will thrive. Click link [Plant Wildflowers for Spring Blooms](#) for more information.



Spring 2024 may seem far away, but if you invest a little time and energy in planting this fall, you will be rewarded with an abundance of blooms when the weather begins to warm next year.

Remember your stories...

...sometimes with a magnolia tree.

Some people are good at being historians. Some are more like me and not all that diligent. I tend to pick up small items from nature to remind me of memorable places or events. I won't save concert tickets from a special date because they are man-made and flimsy, but I will save a shell or a fancy pebble.

Looking back at my life, I think keeping written histories of special events is a good thing that I have ignored. I can't tell you how many times my adult children have asked me to fill in the details of an event in their history and I find myself wondering if I have the story telling right these many years later.

My second husband, (of only seven years) chose to remember a very poignant episode of his life with a 150lb granite memorial stone. (He has a big, over-the-top personality, I guess he needs big, over-the-top memorials, too.) Early in our relationship, he told me about sitting in a funeral home in Magnolia, Texas making plans for the burial of his only adult son. Looking outside he saw several large, beautiful magnolia trees on the grounds. The trees were in full bloom. The multitude of "magnolias" in that moment, plus the memory that Magnolias were one of his son's favorite trees, made him feel like he needed to memorialize that moment with the planting of a magnolia tree and a stone to explain why the tree was there.

But the story doesn't end there. As it turned out a young tree may not be an adequate memorial to go with a 150 pound stone. The first tree that was planted died and had to be replaced. (See light and soil requirements later in this article.) Also, we have moved and taken the memorial stone with us but opted to leave the tree thinking we might kill it in the transplanting. The next young tree we planted was inexpensive because it survived "Snowmegedon 2019-2020". It looks like it will be forever deformed.

Still the trees are beautiful. And I think, worth the trouble. Their flowers smell good, especially some of the smaller deciduous varieties like the saucer magnolia or the lily magnolia.

Most magnolias grow best in moist, well-drained, slightly acid soils but neutral to slightly alkaline soils are also suitable for growth. Magnolias are adaptable to clay, loam, or sand soils, but most grow poorly in wet or poorly drained soils. Well-established plants can be moderately drought tolerant.

Magnolias prefer a spot in the garden that receives full sun to light shade. That said, if you live in a particularly warm or dry climate, your magnolia might benefit from a location shaded from the hot afternoon sun.

There are over 200 members of the Magnolia genus, however only about a dozen are commonly found in the United States and most of our wild species becoming endangered due to loss of habitat.

Here in Texas, the most common species are the Southern Magnolia and their smaller cousins, Little Gem, and Teddy Bear. Southern Magnolias can grow to 90 feet with heavy smooth trunks. At one time their wood was used for furniture and venetian blinds. Now they are prized as ornamentals and sometimes even protected by local and federal ordinances. Southern Magnolia trees can live over 100 years. The Little Gem and Teddy Bear are used extensively as ornamentals because of their smaller size and longer flowering season.

Some of the most striking flowers grow on deciduous varieties and bloom in the early spring before they put on leaves. Some of these are man-made hybrids. These include Saucer Magnolia, Butterfly Magnolia (a yellow variety), Loebner, Felix and Tulip. These trees tend to be smaller and have a shrubby growth habit.



Butterfly Magnolia



Saucer Magnolia

Growing magnolias from seed can be difficult. For more information on pagination from seed, follow the link below to an article by William Welch with Texas A&M:

I hope this story will encourage you to take time to remember and memorialize special moments worth remembering in your life. Although somewhat transient, plants or art in your garden can be a wonderful way to do that. After all, awareness of the journey and its seasons is one of the reasons we garden.

I leave you with one of my favorite quotes from Audrey Hepburn:

**“To plant a garden
is to believe in tomorrow.”**

William Welche's article:

<https://hortipm.tamu.edu/southerngarden/magnolia.html>

A good source of additional information:

<https://www.magnoliasociety.org/home>