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It's Here! Pick up your 2024 Ellis County
Master Gardener's Calendar



AVAILABLE AT THESE SPONSORS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Ellis County Living Magazing | Silverado Lawn & Landscaping |
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| Founders Row, Midlothian, TX | Ellis County Art Association |
| Waxahachie City Center | Waxahachie Farmers Market |
| College Street Pub | Earth Tones Greenery |
| Rigsby's Garden Center | The Waxahachie Sun |
| Lucky's Barber Shop | Journey's Mobile Eats and Treats |
| The Greenery | Boyce Feed & Grain |
| Tex-Scapes Nursery & Landscape | Ellis County Rural Heritage Farm |
| Ebby Halliday Realtors | Ark Country Store |
| Creative Quilters Guild | Larken Farms Orchard |
| Texas Landscaping | Texas Tree Farms |
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December in the garden...

PLANTING

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

FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

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

GARDEN WATCH

- Protect tender vegetation from the cold with lightweight frost cloth available at most nurseries and garden centers.
- Continue to water lawns, newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials if rainfall is insufficient.
- Prepare garden soil for spring planting by tilling in 6 inches of organic matter (compost) to a depth of 8 to 10 inches.
- Take time during the holidays to check out the new seed and nursery catalogues. Order early to ensure availability.
- Let's not forget our feathered friends during the winter when their natural food supply is limited. Providing sunflower, safflower and thistle seed, suet and fruit will attract many species of birds to your backyard. Also be sure to provide water.

WHEN TO PRUNE YOUR PLANTS

by Rob Franks, ECMG

Pruning should begin when the weather has gotten sufficiently cold for long enough for plants to drop their leaves and the plant sap to move down to the roots. Planning pruning once plants have gone dormant provides time for the wounds to heal before new growth starts in the spring.

However, be aware that some plants need to be pruned early in the winter, some later in the winter, some after spring blooms drop, and some not at all.

Shrubs such as evergreens, boxwoods, hollies, and privets can be trimmed in early winter to control their shape and remove unwanted branches. Larger shrubs like Rose of Sharon, Hardy Hibiscus, Crape Myrtle and Hardy Hydrangea can be pruned, but be aware that there are species of these common shrubs that flower in the Spring from old growth, not new growth. If your Crape Myrtle, for instance, flowers from new growth, pruning will not affect flowering. If you do not know, be sure to watch this spring to see where the blooms come from.



Shrub roses may be pruned while they are dormant to shape the plants and remove dead growth. Climbing roses will usually bloom on old growth so pruning will limit the amount of blooming in the spring and summer months.

Vines can be pruned to limit growth and open them up to allow more sunlight into the vines. Vines normally bloom on new growth so a light trim in the winter will not severely limit spring and summer flowering. Vines such as Jasmines, honeysuckles, and passionflowers can all be trimmed.

Trees including oaks, elms, and fruit trees should be pruned early in the winter while the temperatures are coldest. For these trees and others that bleed sap from wounds, early pruning allows for wounds to heal before pests and disease can get a foothold. Flowering trees should not be pruned until after their spring flowers drop.

Grasses and perennial flowers can be pruned back once they have gone dormant and the leaves have dried out. If there are seed heads you may consider leaving the seed heads to provide food for winter birds and do your heavy pruning in early spring.

Finally, there is no bad time to remove suckers from your plants, although winter is best. Some shrubs such as crape myrtle, forsythia, chaste trees, and willows will continually send up new growth from roots and the lower trunks. These can easily form a colony that drains nutrients from the parent plant and makes your plants very unsightly.

Once you have given thought to what and when to prune go to:
<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/landscape/proper-pruning-techniques/>

to learn proper techniques for different plants.


Contest!

How well do you know your Ellis County Master Gardeners?

**Six people watching and one person working.
Does this scene look familiar?**

No, They are not road construction crew workers.



Can you identify the SEVEN Master Gardeners in this picture and be the first to submit their names? If so, you can win a **\$15**  **gift card.**

Please submit answers to Kim Rainey at klgran@att.net
Winner will be announced in the January e-newsletter and prize will be awarded at the January Master Gardener meeting, January 9, 2023.

Gardeners in the photo are ineligible to enter.

LET'S MAKE SEED PAPER!

by Lea Sandoz, ECMG

This is a great way to recycle used paper into something pretty and useful. It's a fun project that can be done indoors or out. Paper making kit area available online and in craft stores, but this article is about doing it without buying extra equipment.

You will need:

- Newspapers, used notebook paper, construction paper, printer paper-any non-glossy scrap paper
- A bowl
- Water
- A mesh, a screen or a "splatter guard"
- Seeds – Small and tiny seeds are best for plantable seed paper, particularly if you plan to write on them. Seeds that work the best are flower seeds, a wildflower mix, or even herbs and vegetables (<https://bluecatpaper.com/plantable-cards-paper-facts>)
- Optional: an old blender (Your blender may not be safe for food after using it to make paper.)
- Optional: Dried flowers, food coloring, fruit and vegetable dyes



Making the Paper

1. Tear up your paper into small pieces. You can use your hands, a hole punch, or scissors.
2. Soak your paper in a bowl of water for a few hours or overnight. Waiting is hard! But this is an important step so that the next step goes smoothly.
3. When your paper has softened, use your hands to massage it and squeeze it into a pulp. Continue to mash your pulp until it is unrecognizable as paper.
4. Drain any excess water from your pulp mixture. Do not squeeze out or remove all the water from the pulp. Just drain any water in the bottom of the bowl.
5. Add your seeds and gently mix them into the pulp.

Optional: add any food coloring, natural "dyes" like beet juice, flower petals, or decorations and mix in.

6. Hold your screen over a sink, a bowl or a towel. Spread the paper pulp over your screen and gently press it into a flat sheet. Try to squeeze out as much water as you can without disturbing your sheet of paper. You can also gently blot it with a towel.

Optional: Use cookie cutters to make shapes in the paper pulp. (You can also cut the paper into shapes after it dries.)



7. Allow the paper to dry. Once it is dry you can lift it off the screen. This takes a while! Be patient.
8. Once you're ready and the weather is right, plant your paper under a shallow layer of soil and keep it moist. Seeds should begin to germinate in a few weeks.

NOTES:

If you use newspapers only, you will get gray paper. Using a mix of newspaper and copy paper makes a lighter colored paper. Junk mail is also a good source of lighter colored paper – just don't use the glossy or slick pieces.

Newsprint will make your hands black – and may stain clothes. Wearing an apron or an old shirt is a good idea.

If you have an old blender, you can soak your paper for ten minutes and then blend it into a pulp. Warning: This might ruin your blender. Most paper does not contain toxic materials, but it's best if you use a blender you don't plan on using for food.

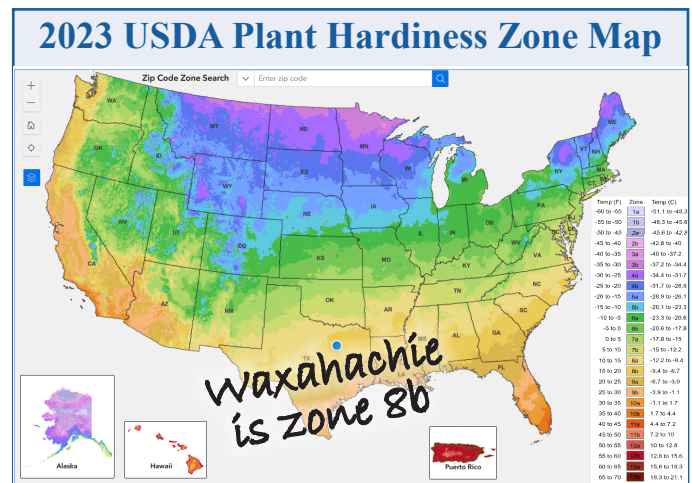
www.nesdis.noaa.gov/about/k-12-education



DO YOU KNOW YOUR HARDINESS ZONE?

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>

Here is a link to the 2023 Plant Hardiness Zone Map (PHZM). This map should serve as a general guide for growing perennial plants in your area. Zones are based on the average lowest temperatures, not the *lowest ever*. Zones in this edition of the USDA PHZM are based on 1991-2020 weather data. This does not represent the coldest it has ever been or ever will be in an area, but it is the average lowest winter temperature for a given location for this 30-year span (1991-2020).



Furthermore, gardeners should recognize that many other environmental factors, in addition to hardiness zones, contribute to the success or failure of plants. Wind, soil type, soil moisture, humidity, pollution, snow, and winter sunshine can greatly affect the survival of plants. Warm season heat and moisture balance are particularly important in this regard. The way plants are placed in the landscape, how they are planted, and their size and health can also influence their survival.

Edible Flowers, Herbs, and Ornamentals! Oh My!

by Bettie Gray, ECMG

Flowers in the garden are like eye candy! They are visually attractive, smell delicious, and some of them are actually edible. There are multiple categories of edible beauties, and a few explored in this article are flowers, herbs, and ornamentals.

For the North Texas landscape and garden, there are flowers that grow well in our area that can add beauty in the garden and delight the taste buds. Flowers such as roses, chrysanthemums, daylilies, gardenias, gladiolus, and lilies are just a few. It is important to note that not all parts of the flowers are edible.

Research is required before ingesting any parts of a flowers to ensure they are truly edible. Additionally, it is important to know how the flowers were grown. Any flowers intended for human consumption should not be treated with any pesticides. To ensure that flowers you'd like to eat is pesticide free, it is best to grow your own. In our area several of the easy to grow from seed flowers are: Calendula (pot marigold), carnations (pinks), bachelor buttons (cone flower), and nasturtiums. Most of these flower seeds can be planted early fall for spring flowers. However, nasturtiums prefer a little warmer weather and should be planted in early spring. Some of these plants may also be available at your local superstore or nursery but please keep in mind that it is important to know if the plants were chemically treated before consuming.



The contrast of the leaves of herbs when planted in groupings offers a visual delight. Example of a complimentary contrast is rosemary with any mint and basil; this combination looks quite pretty in a container. Most herbs are aromatic and provide a pleasing fragrance wherever they are planted. A few flowering herbs are pineapple sage, basil,



Rosemary and Sage

and Texas tarragon. Their floral contrast of red, white, and yellow are very complimentary to each other. All are aromatic and enhances the flavors of many foods. Some herbs are also used for medicinal purposes. Herbs are quite the multi-taskers in the landscape and garden, serving many purposes.

Additionally, ornamental edibles can play an important role in adding texture and color while providing an excellent source of nutrition. The fall is an excellent time of year to grow flowering kale and cabbages. They are of the brassica family and can tolerate some frost similar to their cousins of broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts. The leaves of ornamental kale have deeply frilled edges and the centers of can be white, fuchsia, purple, or red, depending upon the variety.



**Ornamental Cabbage
and Kale**

Ornamental peppers can also add a pop of color in the landscape. For summer color in your landscape or garden a Basket of Fire pepper variety is a Texas Superstar plant. A Texas Superstar is a plant that has been tested to ensure that it will perform well for both consumers and growers in our great state. For more Texas Superstar options, click this link. <https://texassuperstar.com/texas-superstar-plants/>

Gardening is almost a year 'round pleasure in North Texas. As you visit your local stores and nurseries this holiday season, keep your eyes open to find edible flowers, ornamentals, herbs, and seeds for your landscape or garden.

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/guides/specialty-vegetables/edible-flowers/>

<https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2018/06/14/basket-of-fire-pepper-latest-texas-superstar-release/>

<https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2021/06/03/gorizia-rosemary-aka-barbecue-skewers-newest-texas-superstar/>

<https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/county/smith/tips/flowers/ornamental-Kale08.html>

<https://agriflifeextension.tamu.edu/asset-local/texas-superstar-plants/>

This article is a reprint from December 2022. But the information is so timely and useful to those of us who have Christmas Cactus (especially if your cactus doesn't actually bloom at Christmas!).

Christmas Cactus

by Lea Sandoz, ECMG

The Christmas cactus is a favorite plant for the holiday season. With a little bit of care, these plants will provide many years of beautiful holiday blooms. Some plants can last over 100 years. There are reports of 200 year-old plants that have been handed down for generations.



Christmas cacti are short-day plants. They will bloom when the days grow shorter (9-10 hours of light) and temperatures grow cooler. They like bright indirect light. A Christmas cactus will have significant buds by late October or early November. Flower buds form best when the plant is kept in temperatures between 50 and 60°F

You can kickstart the budding process by exposing the plant to temperatures of about 45°F (7°C) for several nights in a row. You can also keep the plant in a dark space for a several days. Withholding water before short days start will stress the plant and may improve bud set.

All the holiday cacti thrive in well-drained potting soil high in organic material. You can add some sand to increase the weight. A good soluble fertilizer, such as 20-20-20, is recommended every two weeks until bud set.

Once your plant has buds, reduce fertilization to about once a month. Water every 2-3 weeks, but only water when the top one third of soil feels dry to the touch. Don't let the plant get bone dry. Over-watering is a major problem for all succulents. Make sure the pot has a good drainage, and that the plant does not sit in water. They really don't like wet feet.

Common causes of flower bud drop include:

- Too much water or not enough water
- Exposure to cold drafts or too warm temperatures
- Over-fertilization
- Rough handling

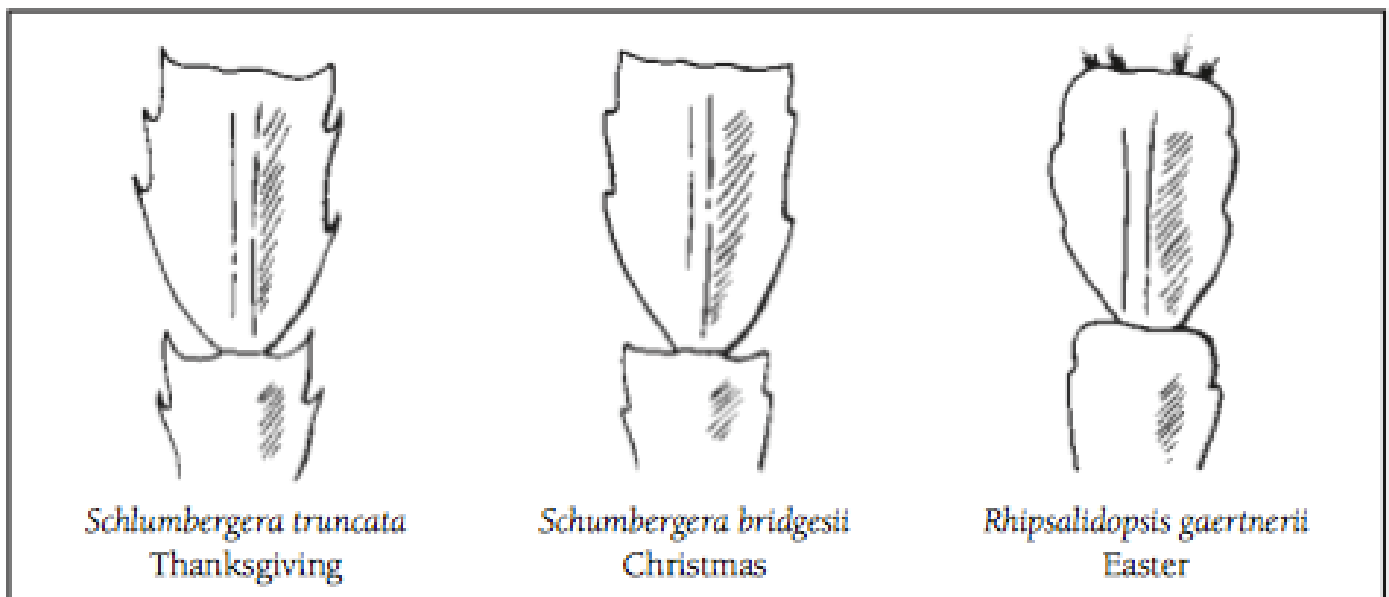
If your cactus sheds its buds one winter, don't worry: it should bloom the following year!

Insects aren't usually a problem. If you see mealy bugs, aphids, and scale wipe away with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol.

Once the flowering season is over, the growing season begins and the plant will produce new vegetative growth. Maintain temperatures of 70-80 degrees for the best growth. They will tolerate temperatures of 90-100 degrees, but growth may be inhibited.

Prune plants in late spring to encourage branching and more flowers. Cut off a few sections of each stem; the plant will branch from the wound. Place the cut pieces in a lightly moist potting soil—they root easily after a few weeks.

Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Easter cactus?



Credit: www.extension.iastate.edu

The key to identifying which type of holiday cactus you're looking at is the leaves. Christmas cactus leaves have a tear-drop shape. Thanksgiving cacti leaves have more of a pointed, claw shaped ends on the leaves. Easter cacti are more rounded with little hair-like growths on the ends. Most cacti sold as Christmas cactus are actually the Thanksgiving variety.

Thanksgiving cacti (*Schlumbergera truncata*) bloom from late fall to mid-winter. Christmas cacti (*S. x buckleyi*) bloom from early winter to mid-winter. Easter cacti (*S. gaertnerii*) bloom from later winter to mid-spring.

Sources:

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/parsons/search.php?category=Christmas%20cactus>

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/news/it-thanksgiving-christmas-or-easter-cactus>

<https://www.almanac.com/plant/christmas-cactus>

<https://www.dailypress.com/life/vp-hl-cactus-mascot-021222-20220212-psfxsf7oujchzcsqslrkcdge-story.html>