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

How About Some HINTS?



Now with hints, can you identify the SEVEN Master Gardeners in this picture? Be the first to correctly name these gardeners and you can win a **\$25 SONIC gift card.**

Please submit answers to Kim Rainey at klgran@att.net
Winner will be announced in the February e-newsletter. Prize will be awarded at the February Master Gardener meeting, February 13, 2023.

And watch for our next contest in February. Something less Master Gardener specific and with a prize you can use at the **2024 EXPO!**



January in the garden...

PLANTING

- Plant trees, shrubs, and woody ornamentals from nursery containers. Plant slightly above the ground line to allow root flare to be exposed.
- Transplant small trees and shrubs while they are dormant. Water the plant well before digging it.
- Plant cold-tolerant herbs such as chives, cilantro, garlic, and parsley; onion transplants late in the month.
- Seed for warm-weather annuals can be planted in flats in a temperature-controlled environment. Tomatoes and peppers can be started from seed mid-month. All require bright light and warm temperatures (60-70oF). Use grow lights for best results.

FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

- Prune trees, including live oaks and red oaks, to remove dead, broken, and unwanted branches. Apply pruning paint to any cut/wound on your oak trees to prevent oak wilt.
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs as needed; and apply a liquid root stimulator monthly.
- Peach and plum trees should be pruned to stimulate lateral branches and keep their “bowl” shape. Thin-out branches to open the center allow more sunlight, resulting in fruit production over the entire tree.
- Apply blood meal or a slow-release fertilizer to pansies and other cool-season annuals.
- Maintain free-form crape myrtles by removing “sprouts” growing from the base, but never cut the tops out. It produces unsightly knots and delays blooming. Removing spent seed pods is OK.

GARDEN WATCH

- Remove by hand, broadleaf weeds such as clover, dandelions, henbit, and chickweed in lawns and beds. If necessary, spray turf with a broadleaf herbicide when temperatures are above 70 degrees. Be careful when using herbicides to prevent the drift from harming desirable plants.
- Don't Guess, Soil Test! The best way to determine your soil's fertility needs is to have it tested. Contact the Ellis County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office at 972-825-5175 for a Soil Sample Information Form, or click [HERE](#) to be directed to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Soil, Water, and Forage Testing site.

EXTREME GARDENING TOPICS:

Extreme Environmental Issues – Since the mid-1990s, city dwellers have been encouraged to adopt management practices to reduce fertilizer runoff and conserve water. Research has shown that large amounts of phosphorus and nitrates are washed from recently fertilized grass sod, regardless of the type of fertilizer, and are contributing to the potential of deficient oxygen levels and algae blooms. As the algae begins to die other organisms consume them using even more oxygen resulting in possible fish kills and “stinky water.” Using a soil test to determine what nutrients are needed and only applying them at the right time will help keep these fertilizers out of our water systems. Contact your local AgriLife Extension office for more details on soil testing.

Compiled by Monty Grearner



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. They probably used a pesticide that is non-specific and kills everything, bad as well as good insects. And, you were probably not told that once you started seeing the new bags the worms were pretty much safe.

There is a more environmentally friendly way that targets only the bagworms. Now 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. The bagworms have only one cycle a year. At least, you will have a lot fewer worms this summer.

Go out to 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 in a jar where they are exposed to outside temperature, out of the light, and watch the bags. When you start seeing tiny worms moving about in the jar, it is time to treat for them. The worms can only be effectively treated 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. At least, you will have a lot fewer worms this summer.

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

Resources

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



**Evergreen
Bagworm Moth**



ECMGA Christmas Auction

by Anne Nimblett, ECMG

The annual Ellis County Master Gardener auction was once again a terrific success. After the general meeting on December 12th, close to fifty Master Gardeners bid on a variety of items generously donated by members. Eighty-seven donations, including everything from handmade jellies and beautiful, hand-crafted art pieces to unusual plants and gift baskets, went to auction.

Master Gardeners and Interns browsed the aisles, bidding on items in hopes of winning an auction or two. In all, this year's auction raised \$1,974. ECMGA will match \$500, bringing the final total donation to \$2,474. Compared to the 2022 auction, this year's auction boasts 38 more donated auction items and \$752.50 more in total donated money!

This money will be split evenly and donated to Helping Hands of Ennis, Manna House, and Waxahachie Cares, where it will help support those in need in our community. Thank you, Ellis County Master Gardeners and Interns, for yet another incredibly successful event!

Succulent Series: The Starfish Cactus

by Marj McClung, ECMG

My Starfish Cactus is named for resemblance, not for relationship. The five-petaled flowers look like a somewhat hairy starfish and the four-sided stems resemble a cactus with no spines and velvet skin. I believe my plant to be *Stapelia gigantea*, but, as with so many of my plants, it came as a plantlet with only a common name. In my case, the common name was Carrion flower which, alas, is also a resemblance name. The flower produces an odor which I don't find strong, but flies and my dog take notice.

The pretty stems grow to 6" to 8" and are very pettable since they aren't cactus at all. This makes a green, interesting house plant which blooms for me in late September to early October. The flowers are very large, 6" or more and a striking pale yellow with rust red, thin squiggles and very fine "hair". It would make a great Halloween flower, but the blooms come too early.

There are many varieties of *Stapelia*, some in purplish red and some with lots of "hair" so it's like growing a plant that blooms small animals. There are similar plants to genus *Stapelia*, genus *Huernia* and genus *Orbea*, that all look similar with similar-sounding descriptions. I haven't come across a good distinction reference, but you can see the plants in bloom at the Succulent Alley website. I can't vouch for the information, but the photos will make you drool.

Based on my research, which is from untested sources, my plant is *Stapelia gigantea*, part of the *Asclepiadaceae* or milkweed family. It is easy to grow as a houseplant, but it won't take the cold weather of our winters. It spends winter indoors and summers outside on the shaded/partial shade patio. It requires normal, well-drained potting soil. It likes to be watered a little each week but I have to be careful not to overwater since the stems will rot. As a succulent, it is tolerant if you miss a watering. Fertilize lightly from spring through blooming. It likes to be pot-bound, so frequent re-potting is not needed.

Sites on the internet say it can produce seed pods with papery seeds that can be planted, but I've never hand-pollinated and the flies haven't done their job, so I have no experience with seeds. The stems can be divided or, if broken off, potted up. Let broken stems lie a few days to develop a callus before planting. The plant will freely branch and gets wide, so broken off stems will be common if you move it. It does tend to cascade down which means a shelf is needed. My plants are windowsill sized for only a year or so before I have to find other places. My Starfish Cactus has never been bothered by mealy bugs, but the internet warns that these plants are susceptible.

If you want an easy-care, cactus-like plant you can pet, with weird but lovely blossoms, try a Starfish Cactus.





by Sharon McIver, ECMG

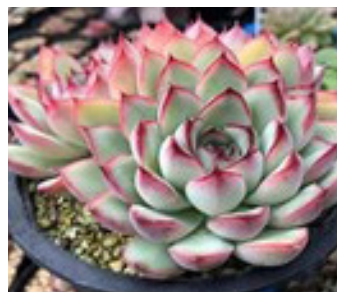
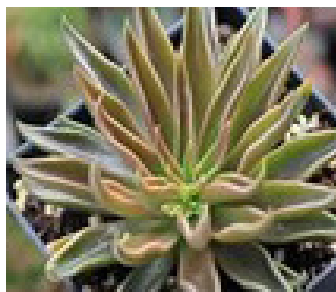
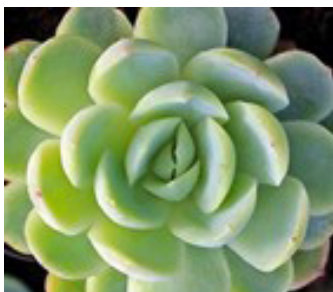
Echeveria, named after the botanical illustrator, Atanasio Echeverria y Godoy, is a large genus of succulent plants comprised of around 150 species. This genus belongs to the Crassulaceae family. Water is stored in the fleshy stems and leaves making them suitable for sub-tropical climates and container growing. The plant's rosette-shaped foliage can be found in a variety of vibrant colors. They generally stay relatively small-sized with rosettes that are typically a few inches in diameter.

Echeveria elegans is one of the more commonly known species used for containers and rock gardens. The name means "gentleness" or "beauty." Some common names for this plant include Hens and Chicks, Mexican Gem, or White Mexican Rose. It's a perennial succulent that grows in rosette-shaped clumps and blooms in late winter to early summer. It is also very suitable for decks or patios.

Regardless of the species you choose, plant your Echeveria in a sunny dry spot and don't fuss over it. This plant doesn't mind a little neglect. Echeveria needs at least 6 hours of full sun daily to flower. Soil should be porous and well-drained. Don't allow excess moisture to collect around the roots. Water sparingly when the leaves begin to wrinkle. Don't overwater as these plants will die from root rot relatively quickly. It's better to wait until the plant dries out completely. Then water thoroughly and allow to dry out again. Do not let moisture collect in the rosette or stand in a saucer under potted plants. Echeverias are not cold-tolerant and excessive humidity can cause root rot. Fertilize sparingly during active growth periods with a succulent or cactus fertilizer.

References:

1. Succulents-University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences(ufl.edu)
2. Echeveria elegans (Mexican Gem, Mexican Hens and Chicks, Mexican Snowball, White Mexican Rose) North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox (ncsu.edu)
3. How to Grow Echeveria (Succulent Tips) (thespruce.com)



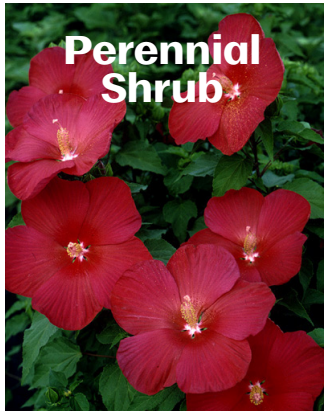
What Do You Know About Texas Superstars®?

Every plant earning the Texas Superstar® designation undergoes several years of extensive field trials by Texas A&M AgriLife Research and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, both part of the Texas A&M System. They must be shown to be super-performing plants under Texas growing conditions.

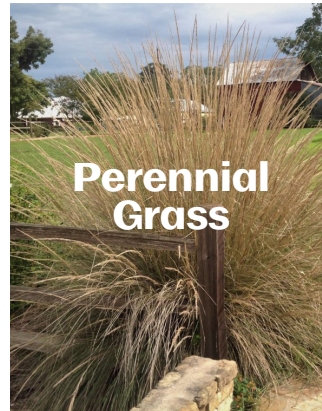
Here are just a few SuperStars to look for, there are many more.

Check out this list from Texas A&M.

<https://texassuperstar.com/texas-superstar-plants/>



'Flare' Hibiscus has apple green foliage and large, high quality fuchsia red flowers. Four feet tall, it is a profuse bloomer with luxuriant rebloom. This wonderful cultivar does great in any soil type, even our sticky, highly alkaline clays.



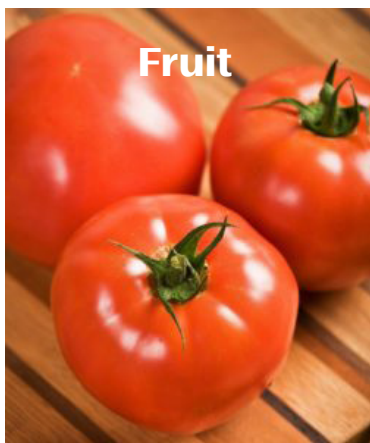
Lindheimer muhly is a clump-forming, tough, warm-season perennial grass native to Texas. Foliage is typically 3- to 4-feet tall with flower stalks extending an additional foot above the foliage.



Globe amaranth (AKA bachelor's buttons) are versatile, often overlooked summer annuals that thrive in the Texas heat. Varieties range in size from 8" to 48 " and vary in color from whites, to pinks, to lavendars, to dark, rich purples.



Angelonia is a spreading annual with upright flower spikes that resemble miniature snapdragons. The Serena™ series are the only angelonias that are grown from seed. Flower colors available include white, pink, purple, lavender and lavender pink.



The **Celebrity tomato**, long recognized as the variety by which all new tomatoes are measured. "When we test new tomato varieties, we look for characteristics that are as good or better than Celebrity, and that is not easy to do." (Larry Stein, Ph.D.) This F1 hybrid was first produced in the USA by Colen Wyatt with the seeds being commercially distributed in the late 1980s. This is a vigorous plant that will typically produce 20 or more very plump, robust tomatoes. Fruits weigh approximately 8 oz. and are 4 inches across. Plants need caging or staking.