

emeritus:

(/ə'meritəs/) an honorary title granted to someone who retires from a position of distinction

Congratulations to the following Ellis County Master Gardeners who have chosen to accept emeritus status. We have benefited from your service, we hope we will continue to benefit from your wisdom and knowledge.



Arlene Hamilton
23 years



Ray Pouliot
14 years



George & Ginger Cole
14 years



Joan Brammer
14 years



Cheryl Sandoval
14 years

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February in the garden...

PLANTING

- Cool-season vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, and potatoes should be planted mid-month, or about 4 weeks before the average last freeze date (March 15 in Ellis County). Beets, carrots, lettuce, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, and “greens” (collard, mustard, and turnip) should be planted 2 to 4 weeks before the average last freeze.
- Plant asparagus crowns in 10-12 inches of soil. When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially with bare-root plants. Small to medium sizes establish faster.
- Dig and divide warm-season perennials (cannas, coneflowers, perennial salvia, mums) before they break dormancy.

FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

- Prune bush roses around Valentine's Day. Prune old, dead, and weak canes back to the ground. Leave 4 to 8 vigorous canes, removing one-half of their growth above an outward-facing bud. Wait to prune climbing or leaning roses until after they bloom. Prune errant canes at any time to maintain shape.
- Herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses may be cut back now. Prune autumn sage (*Salvia gregii*) by 50%. Mexican heather grass does not require pruning.
- Dig and divide large clumps of ornamental grasses, especially if the center of the plant has died.
- Cut or mow liriopse before new growth emerges. Trim Asian jasmine back to 4 or 5 inches.

GARDEN WATCH

- Begin controlling insects and diseases on fruit and nut trees. Spraying is essential for a successful harvest. Click [HERE](#) to access the Homeowners Fruit and Nut Spray Schedule for Ellis County.
- Look for aphids and caterpillars on vegetables, and control them with insecticidal soap and Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), respectively.
- Check for scale insects adhering to the trunk, branches, and leaves of hollies, euonymus, shade trees, fruit, and pecan trees. Apply horticultural oil to control these and other over-wintering insects.
- For the more difficult-to-control crape myrtle bark scale, apply a neonicotinoid insecticide, such as imidacloprid, as a soil drench to the root zone of infested trees.

Original Post by: Monty Grearner

Ellis County Master Gardeners present

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE: A Monthly Gardener's Companion

Every gardener's true companion piece is a journal and this one is written and designed with Ellis County gardeners in mind. Packed with county-specific details for every landscape and garden vision. From novice to seasoned gardener, this journal is sure to thrill.

First edition available at the
LAWN & GARDEN EXPO
March 23, 2024
More details coming!

Don't throw away that celery or romaine lettuce base!

by Paul Thomas, ECMG intern

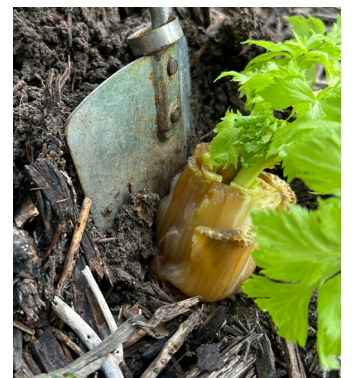
Instead, keep two inches of the base and plop it into water. When the water gets slimy, dump the water and add new. Keep doing this until you have leaves forming.



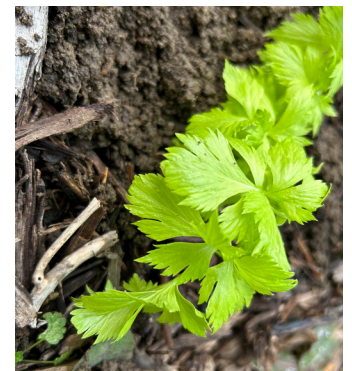
Ready to plant? Bury up to the base of the new sprout (the top of the old base). You don't necessarily need roots forming. They're already doing it inside the old base. Also, you don't need to amend the soil. We just put them in native soil where we keep wildflowers, and they do fine.



Harvest throughout a mild winter. When romaine bolts in the summer, let it go to seed and scatter the seeds. If you're lucky, the seeds will form new plants!



This likely works for other plants. Experiment and let us know if you were successful with something else!



The why and how of Lasagna Gardening

by Rob Frank, ECMG

Lasagna bed gardening is a layering technique that lets you create a garden bed without digging or tilling— or improve an existing bed in just one day.

A lasagna garden normally sits above the ground but can also be used to improve the soil in in-ground beds. Instead of filling with only fresh soil, you will stack compostable materials like newspaper, cardboard, sticks, leaves, and grass clippings in with compost and soil. Over time the compostable materials will decompose and turn it into a rich, nutrient-dense soil of its own.

Lasagna beds are a way to grow organically and use less water, since many of the decomposing materials help retain moisture.

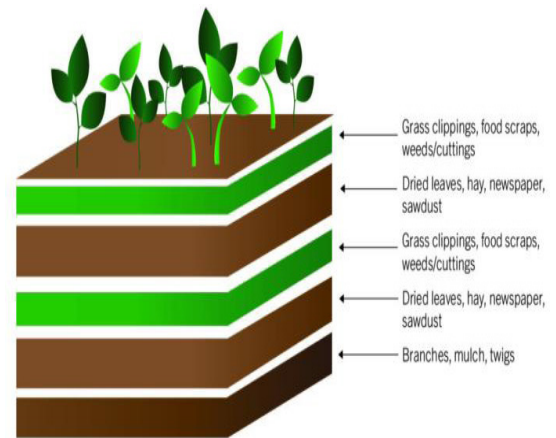
The ideal lasagna garden bed uses a mix of 4 parts high-carbon to 1 part high-nitrogen ingredients.

- **High-carbon materials.** Think of these as your brown layers. You can include things like small pieces of tree trimmings, sticks, peat moss, dried leaves, straw, mulch, and sawdust. If you use sawdust, consider that many lumber products are treated and should not be used.
- **High-nitrogen materials.** These are your green layers. Include materials such as grass clippings, vegetable scraps (or produce that's past its prime), coffee grounds, and even manure from plant-eating animals.
- **A base layer:** for a new bed, cover the area in newspaper or cardboard; for an existing bed, start with a layer of sticks and tree trimmings.
- **Note:** If you use leaves, smaller pieces are better. I purchased a small leaf shredder for the leaves and small sticks. Smaller decomposes quicker and allows water to pass through easier.



Stack your lasagna layers as follows:

1. Base layer (See description on previous page.
You will only need one Base layer.)
2. A high-carbon (brown) layer, keeping your 4:1 ratio in mind.
3. A high-nitrogen (green) layer about $\frac{1}{4}$ as thick as the carbon one.
4. A thin layer of good compost alternated between layers will assist decomposition.
5. Repeat this process until you reach your desired height (18-24" inches tall is ideal).



Timing:

If you're creating your lasagna garden in the fall, you can wait for your lasagna bed to turn into a rich, nutrient-dense soil. Or, if you start in the winter or early spring, you can plant seed and/or started plants directly in your bed after the danger of frost has passed. A top layer of soil will help your seeds get started, and be sure that any manure is fully composted before planting.

During the growing season, continue to follow the 4:1 ratio while adding compostable materials to the top to keep a steady supply of new nutrients coming into your plot. In future growing seasons, add alternating layers to the top as needed.



My Love Affair with Datura

by Angie McKune, ECMG intern

I have been growing Datura in my yard for years. I don't even remember how I got the seeds or if it was a transplant. It is one of my favorite plants due to its hardiness, night time beauty, and requiring little care.

The genus Datura is from the nightshade family (Solanaceae) and has 9 different species. Most people refer to them as thornapples or jimsonweeds, but they are also known as Devil's Trumpets. It is not the same thing as Angel Trumpet, which is in another genus.

Datura has been used for thousands of years in medicine, magic, and other more nefarious activities and has been used in Greek, Roman, Hindu and Aztec cultures. **All species of Datura are extremely poisonous**, especially their seeds and flowers, which can cause difficulty breathing, abnormal heartbeats, delirium, hallucinations, psychosis, and even death if taken internally. Because of this, several states have passed legislation prohibiting Datura. Some states banning Datura include Connecticut and Kansas.

So, I bet you are asking why would you want to even have this in your yard? If you have pets that eat plants, then I probably would not have it growing in my landscape. Fortunately, my dogs have no interest in eating plants, so I allow it to grow. I grow it for its nighttime beauty and ease of care. I grow mine in the ground. I have horrible soil (white caliche clay), so I am happy to have something that will grow without a lot of fuss! If you have one plant, then plan on having more as it reseeds easily, and some say it is invasive. Once established if you decide to pull it up, just know you will likely have to pull it up again the following year. I have found that it only reseeds and grows in the same spot year after year. It does die back to the ground in the winter. I grow mine in full sun and only water when we don't have any rain. If allowed to depend on rain fall alone, it will be a shorter, squattier plant. If it receives supplemental water, it



This picture shows my Datura in an area that got watered regularly. You can see how large it can get! It almost overtook my patio!

can be quite large. Mine grew to about 5-6 feet tall and 5-6 feet wide but was beautiful when blooming. The flowers open at dusk and the fragrance is wonderful. They are typically white but can have some purple hues in the center. Some species are more of a lavender color and can also come in yellow, purple, lavender, and red. They are quite large and beautiful! In addition, it attracts pollinators like the Sphinx Moth, which I love to see feeding on it at night. Another cool feature is if you break a branch it smells like peanut butter! After it flowers it forms spiny seed heads that dry and then crack open, and then the seeds drop. If you want, you can collect the seed heads once they open and just shake the seeds on the ground somewhere else, and it will come up the following year. But handle with care; they can be sharp!

As far as care, I occasionally water in the summer if it's real hot and dry. I have never fertilized it, but I'm sure it wouldn't hurt occasionally use an all-purpose fertilizer. Mine has always bloomed prolifically without it. If you want it to get big, then water more. It grows quickly, so allow plenty of room. It also can grow in a container, but mine stayed small in a container and didn't bloom as prolifically.



to

Datura can be difficult to find. I have only seen one nursery in our area that carried it, and that was a few years ago. You will probably have better luck getting seeds from someone who has a plant.

If you have a spot in your yard and want a beautiful plant with flowers and fragrance, I encourage you to try Datura. You won't be disappointed!

References:

[How to Grow and Care for Daturas - World of Flowering Plants](#)

[Datura | Description, Genus, Family, Drug, & Facts | Britannica](#)



Yellow



Purple



Seed

These plants will thrive in Texas...

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U B Y W G C D N A Z Y S A N R
A U E G A S K Q N I V O I I G
A I P G U T G Y Y N A A U P A
R M N R O S E J J N Y L C A Z
K L U U M N Z R A I V L V K P
A C E S T J I T L A P I B N I
O C W R T E N A D I T I E I S
H O L L Y A P U S E L U L H T
G A G B L G S I X A G Y X C A
T E N N O B E U L B L A J T C
S U C S I B I H P O X V S O H
R E P P E P Y E L O I N I M E
T U R K S C A P L N R E X A B
P N R V D M W H C Z C U S T P
V Z K S H N P A X Y R X M O V

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Words can go in any direction. Words can share letters as they cross over each other.



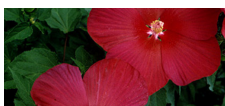
BEGONIA



BLUEBONNET



CHINKAPIN



HIBISCUS



HOLLY



LANTANA



OAK



PEPPER



PETUNIA



PHLOX



PISTACHE



ROSE



SAGE



SALVIA



SATSUMA



TOMATO



TURKSCAP



VINCA



VITEX



WATERLILLY



ZINNIA

Answer on page 14

Puzzle compiled by Teresa Brown, ECMG intern

Common Seed Starting Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

by Donna Summerlin, ECMG

An essential skill to develop for an abundant garden is to successfully start plants from seeds. Seed starting provides access to a wider variety of plants at a lower cost than when using purchased seedlings. Since plants take up valuable retail space, garden centers offer only those that are in high demand and profitable to sell. On the other hand, seeds take up very little space and are easy to ship when ordered online, allowing a huge variety to be available at a lower price.



There are other advantages to starting plants from seeds, but I think the biggest one for me is that it's fun and sort of awe-inspiring when a seed goes from a small object that appears to be lifeless to a healthy, green plant. However, it can be frustrating to spend time, energy and money to start seeds only to have them fail to thrive.

I haven't always had a great outcome when trying to get seeds to germinate, grow and transplant to the garden, so I've put together a list of mistakes that I've made and learned from over the years in the hopes that it will help you to succeed in your seed starting efforts.

1. Using seeds that are not viable. Seeds have a lower germination rate as they age or if they are stored improperly (they need a cool, dry environment). Seed packets generally indicate the period in which they should be used. If viability is in question, wrap a few seeds in a damp paper towel and put aside for a few days. Keep the seeds moist and check them daily to see if they have sprouted. If the seeds haven't sprouted by the end of the germination period for the type of seed, they are not viable and should be discarded. I often use this method for seeds I have harvested from the previous year's garden. The seeds that sprout in the paper towel can be transferred to seed starting medium.

2. Not using high quality seed starting medium. Soil for starting seeds needs to have nutrients to feed the young plants until they are ready to transplant. The soil should also be loose enough to allow water, air, and

nutrients to penetrate, but dense enough to retain some moisture. If the seed starting soil is compacted, it can retain too much moisture, which can lead to mold and other issues.

3. Not planting seeds under the correct conditions. Each type of seed has specific requirements that need to be met for it to sprout. It's important to read the directions on the seed packet or to research germination requirements to obtain information regarding:

a. Location. Some plants have delicate root systems and do not transplant well. Those seeds should be sown outdoors rather than started inside. Other plants grow better when planted inside and transplanted to the garden.

b. Preparation. Seeds with hard coatings should be soaked and/or scarified before they are planted for the best results.

c. Temperature. Most seeds that can be started inside need to be kept at 70° - 80°. Heat mats can be used to keep seeds at the proper temperature for germination. Seeds planted outside will not sprout until the soil reaches the temperature required for the type of seed. If planted earlier, they may remain dormant and sprout when the temperature is reached.

d. Planting depth. Some seeds require light to germinate and should not be covered with any soil, while others should be planted at a specified depth in the soil. The seeds that should not be covered with soil can be lightly dusted with vermiculite to prevent them from washing or blowing away.

4. Not enough light. After seeds have sprouted, the seedlings need lots of bright light to grow properly – 12 to 16 hours per day. Plants that do not have adequate light stretch to find the light they need. I've found that a window does not provide enough light for seedlings to grow properly. Lights marketed as "grow lights" are expensive and are not necessary for starting seeds. It's best to use fluorescent or LED lights directly over the seed trays and adjust them upward as the seedlings grow. Seedlings also need a period of darkness each day for optimal growth. I use a timer to turn the lights on and off.

5. Too little or too much water. Seeds and young plants need the proper amount of water to flourish. Seeds should be kept covered with a dome or plastic wrap to retain moisture, but the coverings should be removed once the seeds have sprouted since seeds need more water to germinate than is healthy for the young plants. Seedlings grown indoors tend to dry out rapidly and should be checked daily to see if more water is needed. Too much water is also a problem, as it can cause the roots to rot and lead to fungal diseases. Bottom watering works well to keep the seedlings hydrated - add water to the trays containing the seedlings and allow them to absorb it for a few minutes, then pour off the excess, if any.

6. Not hardening off. Once the chance of a freeze has passed and seedlings are ready to be transplanted, it's important to acclimate them to the outdoors. Don't skip this step, or the time and effort put into getting the seedlings to this stage will be for naught! Move the seedlings outdoors to a protected location, out of direct sun and wind and continue to keep them adequately watered. After a few days in this spot, expose the seedlings to direct sunlight for one hour. Add an additional hour of sun exposure each day until the seedlings can remain in full sun for a whole day. At this point, the seedlings are ready to be planted in the garden.

I've found starting seeds to be very rewarding, offering an enormous variety of flowers and vegetables that are not available as seedlings at garden centers. I hope this list of tips for avoiding mistakes helps you to get your seeds off to a great start.

Happy gardening!

For additional information, see [Starting Seedlings at Home.](#)



Suet Cakes for Your Bird Feeder

by Marj McClung, ECMG

Gardening is a collaborative endeavor. I rely on pollinators for some of my food crops and birds and wasps for pest control. I especially appreciate the wrens who check my open greenhouse every day in spring and summer for pests. Through the Merlin app (free), I can record and identify what my helpers are from their songs and conversations.

I was fortunate to observe bird banding several times when the Hummer/Bird Study Group set up at Fort Morgan State Historic Site near Gulf Shores, Alabama. The group set up nets in the woods to trap migratory birds. Several times an hour, they would check the nets, bring back the birds, weigh them, check for body fat, band the birds and set them free. That point on the Gulf of Mexico was where many migratory birds left the US heading for Central and South America. Birds entered into their computer one day would often show up the next day as being caught and recorded in Honduras or Ecuador.

The group centered around its founders, Martha and Bob Sargent, master bird banders. They were a retired couple who took up bird banding specializing in hummingbirds. They were instrumental in researching late-migrating “winter” hummingbirds (leave the feeders out; some are just late migrators) and Bob wrote the book on leucistic (lacking pigment) hummers. Martha’s cookbook contained a recipe for suet feeders.

Following is a variation of this recipe that I have used for years to reward my “pest patrol”.

2 cups peanut butter. I often use chunky. I get peanut butter with sugar, not artificial sweetener. Here is the opportunity to get the cheap stuff. (I like the expensive stuff for my own use.)

2 cups lard. If this is hard to find, ask who had real, homemade tamales for Christmas and find where the cook shops. You can use shortening instead but avoid that with palm oil.

2 cups quick cooking oats

2 cups cornmeal

1 cup flour

1/3 cup sugar

You can also add several cups of **bird seed, raisins, or dried mealworms.**



I spoon the peanut butter and then lard into a glass measuring cup and microwave to semi-liquify. Then I mix with the dry ingredients. Use a glass bowl, so if it cools and stiffens up, you can microwave again to finish stirring.

Use Ziplock square 20 oz, 2.5 cup storage containers. They have hips, so stacked empties don't stick together. Fill up to the hip (about 1.5 cups) and put in the freezer to store. These containers make square suet cakes that perfectly fit the wire cages for suet. These work best in cold weather. In warmer winters, check the suet cakes often. Discard if there is mold.



If you visit Gulf Shores, the Birding Coalition of the Americas now bands at Fort Morgan. It is an education to watch them.

Puzzle Solution page 9

