



## July's Calendar of Events

**1<sup>st</sup>**

- Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market - We are in the middle of Summer, but this is the time to prepare for Fall gardens. Come to our booth for Autumn ideas. Indian Trail Master Naturalists will be there with activities for children.

**4<sup>th</sup>**

- Fourth of July Parade -

Wave to us as our entry passes in the Waxahachie July 4th Parade. We'll have candy and wildflower seed packs to give out!

**8<sup>th</sup>**

- Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market - Learn how to keep your summer flowers blooming into Fall.

**14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>**

- Master Gardener Booth at The Quilt Show in Ennis - Come by our booth at the Creative Quilters Guild of Ellis County show "Texas in Bloom" at Sokol Hall in Ennis with any gardening questions. Let the quilts inspire you to grow the blossoms that inspired the quilts!

**15<sup>th</sup>**

- Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market - Start your vegetables in the Summer so you can harvest before the first freeze. We have a list of vegetables with start dates to help.

**22<sup>nd</sup>**

- Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market - Now is the time to plant bulbs for Fall blooms.

**29<sup>th</sup>**

- Master Gardener Booth at Waxahachie Farmers' Market - Come by for ideas on using your Summer and Fall Harvest.

## Table of Contents

page

**2**

*What to do in the garden in July*

page

**3**

*My time as a Master Gardener Intern*

page

**5**

*Swallowtails on Fennel - photo-essay*

page

**6**

*Strawbale Gardening- Part I*

page

**8**

*Worm Primer Part II*

page

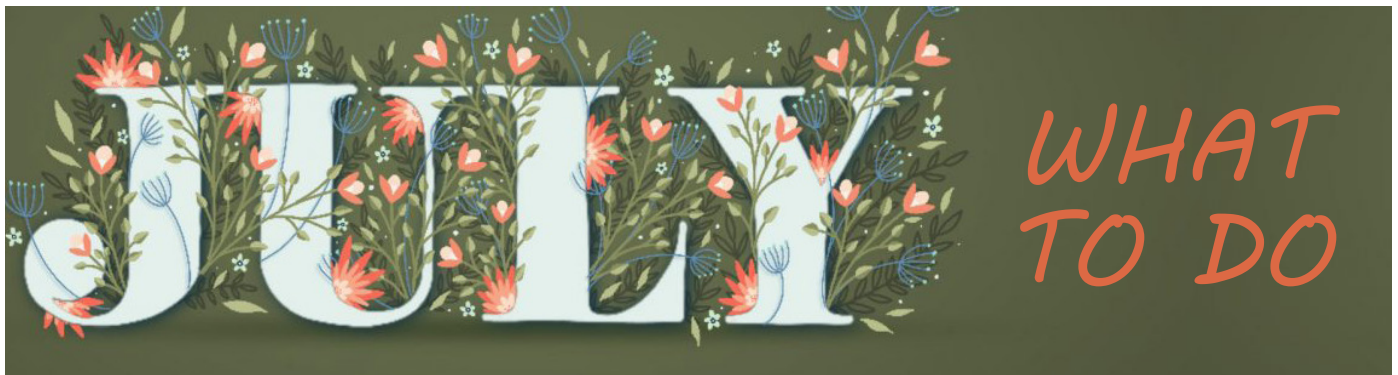
**11**

*Herbed Cheese Puffs*

page

**12**

*Sparkplug Takes a Nature Walk*



## PLANTING

- ✿ Plant tomatoes and peppers from four-inch pots. For recommended varieties visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable>.
- ✿ Early July is the time to plant small and medium pumpkins for a Halloween harvest.
- ✿ Plant heat-tolerant annuals that have been acclimated to hot, sunny conditions. This includes moss rose, purslane, trailing lantana, purple fountain grass, firebush and copper plants.
- ✿ Lawn grasses can be planted this month, but you will need to water twice daily for short intervals to keep soil surface moist until the grass has established good roots, usually in two to three weeks.

## FERTILIZING AND PRUNING

- ✿ Fertilize plants that bloom on new growth, such as crape myrtles, tropical hibiscus and roses, with a high-nitrogen fertilizer to promote late-summer growth and fall blooms. Apply same fertilizer to boost summer annuals and fall-flowering perennials.
- ✿ Light pruning of erratic spring growth may be done to maintain the natural form. Dead and diseased wood from trees and shrubs should be removed. Major pruning should be postponed until mid-winter.
- ✿ Deadhead all blooming plants. Remove dead leaves and spent blooms from container plants.

## GARDEN WATCH

- ✿ Be a “plant health” detective! Plants respond in various ways to heat and drought stress. These symptoms are often misdiagnosed as an insect or disease problem. Correctly identify the problem before turning to a pesticide.
- ✿ Galls on leaves of oaks, hackberries and other trees are caused by many species of gall-forming insects and are a result of the female stinging the leaf tissues as she lays her eggs. Galls are harmless since the insect doesn't feed on plant tissues.
- ✿ Watch for lawn pests. Dry, light-colored areas in sunny parts of St. Augustine are probably the result of chinch bugs (small black insects with a white diamond on their backs). Apply Merit (imidacloprid) or other labeled insecticide. Grub worms are the culprits if the turf turns brown and easily comes up when pulled on. Treat with a granular insecticide.
- ✿ Rapid death of established landscape plants and orchard trees during the summer may signify the presence of cotton root rot, a soil-borne fungal disease common in our calcareous clay soils. Since there is no effective control, verification by the Plant Diagnostic Lab at Texas A&M (<http://plantclinic.tamu.edu>) will help you know what plants can be used as replacements.



# My Time as a Master Gardener Intern

by Donna Summerlin, ECMG

I remember as a young girl following my grandmother around her garden in East Texas and seeing all the vegetables growing abundantly there. My grandmother would pick the vegetables and prepare healthy side dishes to go along with delicious fried chicken and cornbread. She also had an enormous hydrangea shrub in front of her house covered with beautiful, blue blooms as large as my head. From my earliest memories, I knew that I would one day be a gardener just like my grandmother.

As the years went by, I planted and tended small gardens with varying degrees of success while working full-time and parenting three daughters. I heard about the Ellis County Master Gardeners and decided I would join someday. The idea of becoming

involved in a program where I could use my interest in gardening to help the community and meet people who had similar interests appealed to me. That someday finally came last year, and the experience far exceeded my expectations.



The steps to becoming an Ellis County Master Gardener (ECMG) begin with applying to and being accepted in the program and completing the classes and final exam. The word "exam" caused me a little anxiety, but my fellow classmates and I were told not to worry, the test would be open book and could be taken over a couple of weeks. Once we passed the test, we became Ellis County Master Gardener interns and were able to attend member meetings and work toward fulfilling our commitment toward volunteer hours.

The ECMG members at the meetings are always very welcoming and generous to share their knowledge and experience with the interns, and sometimes they share cuttings, plants, seeds, etc. from their gardens. They also provide delicious snacks, which are shared during social time prior to the monthly meetings. Speakers share valuable garden-related information at each meeting, and interns earn volunteer hours for the meetings they attend.

In addition to the meetings, there are many ways to earn volunteer hours, depending on the individual's interests, including maintaining the community gardens, answering calls from the public with gardening questions, working at the





Waxahachie Farmer's Market, and writing articles for the e-newsletter (like this one). A big (and, in my experience, the most fun) source of volunteer hours is the annual ECMG Expo and Plant Sale that has occurred in March for the past 22 years. Smiles could be seen on the faces of the community members who attended the event, and my granddaughters still talk about how much they enjoyed the children's area.

Now that I have met the volunteer requirements, my time as an ECMG intern has ended and I have become a member. I still enjoy volunteering, as it gives me the opportunity to learn more about gardening in Ellis County and to get together with new friends who don't tire of talking about gardening while we work together in the community gardens. My skills have also benefited from the training and experience I've gained since joining the ECMG program.

I have included a few pictures taken in my flower garden. I think my grandmother would be proud.



If you are interested in becoming a Master Gardener please fill out the form on our website so we can contact you.

<https://txmg.org/ellis/how-can-i-become-a-master-gardener>

- Open to residents (18 or older) of Ellis County or nearby areas.
- Selection is based on the volunteer needs of our organization and the qualifications of the applicants.
- All applications will be kept in strict confidence and privacy is respected.
- **Requirements** – Interest in helping people; Ability and desire to learn; Willingness to provide unbiased, research-based information; Be a team player.
- **CLASS SIZE WILL BE LIMITED TO 25**
- **GARDENING EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE NOT REQUIRED**

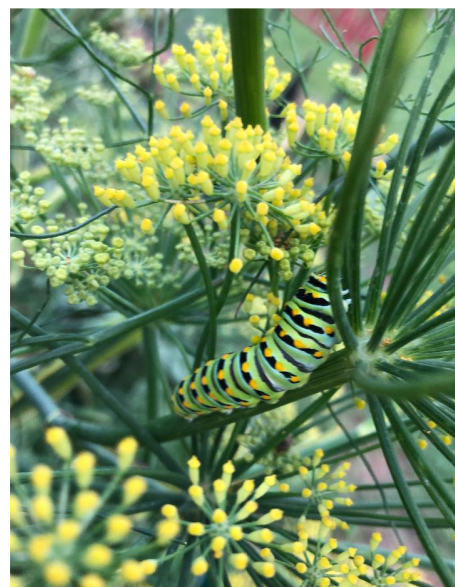
The 2023 Ellis County Master Gardener Intern Class is a 50+ hour class which will begin weekly on September 7th, 2023 and continue until November 16, 2023. If you're interested in taking the class, please fill out the form at the bottom of this page and we'll get in touch with you. Hope to see you there!





## Swallowtails on Fennel

Photography by Malcom Avaritt.  
2021 Master Gardener Intern  
Certified Master Gardener (2022)





# STRAWBALE GARDENING - PART 1

by Beth Norris, ECMG

Have you ever heard about Straw Bale gardening? The first time I heard about it was while watching an episode of Growing a Greener World with Joe Lampl when he ran a story about a gentleman growing heirloom tomatoes from his home driveway. Straw bales were used for several of his varietal tomatoes, and they looked amazing to me. I started to do some research on my own and got a little more interested in that notion. I then asked a fellow master gardener, and she showed me hers and I thought, well surely, I can pull this off, right?

Here is my story and take on straw bale gardening. I had to convince my awesome and super supportive husband that this was going to be an experiment and one in which I would require little or no assistance from him. Needless to say, he is very good natured and while less excited to start this experiment than I was, he was curious enough to see if we could pull this off!



## STEP 1

Where in the world do you get a straw bale! It is important to note here that you can't use hay bales as they are not recommended for this type of gardening. More research followed and we decided on a feed store in Waxahachie to make our purchase. While there, a good idea would be to purchase your 28-0-0 nitrogen fertilizer. (See any one of the links below for more specific how-to instructions.)



## STEP 2

How do you get those home if you do not own a pick-up truck? My clever husband thought ahead enough to bring plastic sheeting and some old sheets to protect the back of our SUV so he could bring those home with little to no clean-up of said SUV. However, we did smell the straw for a few weeks afterwards. That could explain why I have not been able to get the theme song from "Green Acres" out of my head ever since!



## STEP 3

Where to position the straw bales. Some very good tips on where to position your straw bales and why are at the end of this article. Important to note here: you need to make sure your bales are positioned in the right side up position. You can easily tell if the straws are pointing up and down or sideways. They need to be vertical or pointing up and down. Make sure the wire supporting the shape of your bales is sturdy. If uncertain about this, you can reinforce with more wire or other material. We decided to put them close to my raised beds as we would water the bales the same time, we water those beds. They also need to be in mostly sunny areas, so they are not shaded out.



## STEP 4

Begin the 12-day process of preparing the bales. That's right folks, 12 days! Which is important to think about ahead of time in case you're set and ready to start planting your transplants or seeds as soon as you get your bales home. Also, you do not want to bring home your bales and then go on a vacation during the 12-day process or you will not be able to prepare your bales appropriately. You will be watering them thoroughly for the first 3 days; then pouring nitrogen on them and watering more for the next 6 days and then watering for the last 3 days.

**STEP 5**

Once your bales are ready to plant, the fun begins! You need to decide what you want to grow in your straw bales. Usually, 3-4 plants will grow easily in each bale. I used okra, basil, and tomatoes for my two bales. To get them ready to transplant, I first had to dig holes in the straw bales to plant in. I found it more difficult to cut a hole than to use my hand spade to dig down a small cut and then used my hands to pull out the straw. Really not that hard and almost fun. I then added some good gardening soil suitable for vegetables and planted my transplants with their soil into the holes.

Now I get to watch to see what happens! Tune in next month for my update and final thoughts on this experiment!



Links to related articles and videos:

[Straw Bale Garden IL university](#)

[Straw Bale Garden WSU](#)

[Straw Bale Garden WVU](#)

[Straw bale garden tamu](#)

[Straw Bale Video](#)



# A Worm Primer... *There is so much to learn about worms!*

by Kim Rainey, ECMG

## Part II: Composting with worms.

Last month we wrote about the “bad” invasive worms that can be found in our area. This month we will be talking about harnessing the natural abilities of “good” worms to make rich compost and worm castings.

### Types of “good” worms:

**Nightcrawlers.** This earthworm is common in the northern states and may be picked from fields and lawns at night for commercial fish bait sale. Although very popular with fishermen, they are not commonly raised on a commercial basis because they reproduce slowly and require special production and control procedures.

**Field worms** (*also known as garden worms*). These make excellent fish bait and are often preferred by those who want a small number of worms for their own use. They are not prolific breeders and are not recommended for composting purposes.

**Manure worms** (*red wigglers*). These are particularly adaptable to commercial production and are commonly grown by successful worm farmers.

**Red worms.** These are basically another type of manure worm, differing mainly in size and color from their larger and darker cousins. They are adaptable to commercial productions and together with manure worms constitute about 80 to 90 percent of commercially produced worms.

Manure worms and red worms can adapt to living in many different environments. They will eat almost any organic matter as well as many other types of materials that contain organic substances that can be ingested. A first-time grower should purchase breeding stock from a reputable grower or distributor.

There is a lot to think about when planning to compost with worms.

**Container, bedding, diet, and temperature all come into play.**

The whole process is much more labor- and knowledge-intensive than I had first expected. I was naive.

Housing, temperature, and location. If you have the room, it is possible to raise worms in the house. The big advantage to this is that it provides a temperature-controlled environment. This is just me, but worms in the house are not my thing.

If you're putting your worms outside, they must be protected from the worst of the heat and cold. Worms thrive at temperatures





between 55° and 77° Fahrenheit. Worms also need moisture to keep their skin moist, but too much liquid and your bin will smell, plus your worms might drown.

**There are as many types of worm bins as there are people with money to spend on them.** The simplest are little more than two plastic tubs set inside each other with a lid and holes drilled in the inner tub for ventilation.

The simple bins require you to harvest the castings by hand. There are several ways to do this. One way is to push the contents to the side in your bin and add new bedding and food to the empty side. The worms will migrate into the fresh side, and you can “carefully” pull out the old bedding which is now mostly worm castings. Another way is to dump everything out onto a tarp and “sort” through the castings to remove the worms and cocoons. A fine mesh screen can help with this. With either method, you should stop feeding your worms for a few days before harvesting. Bright light can be used to help move worms. They don't like light and will move away from it.



Very elaborate bins have ways to drop the castings out of the bottom while keeping the worms safe at the top. This isn't as difficult as it may sound because composting worms will generally stay in the top six inches of material in the bin. As the food and bedding are digested, additional food and bedding are added to the top. After enough height has been gained, the bottom of the bin is opened to release the castings below. The size of your bin will determine how much kitchen waste you can process each week and how many worms you will need to run it.

***This is from Uncle Jim's Worm Farm website:***

*You can use commonly-known rules of thumb to get a very rough estimate of how much worm castings you can produce. Conservatively, worms can eat 25-50% of their own weight per day and at maximum density, you will have around 2-lbs. of worms per square foot of compost. So, 2-lbs. of worms will be able to process roughly 1-lb. of food waste per day under good conditions. Roughly 50-70% of this will exit the worm in the form of worm castings.*

**Bedding and diet**

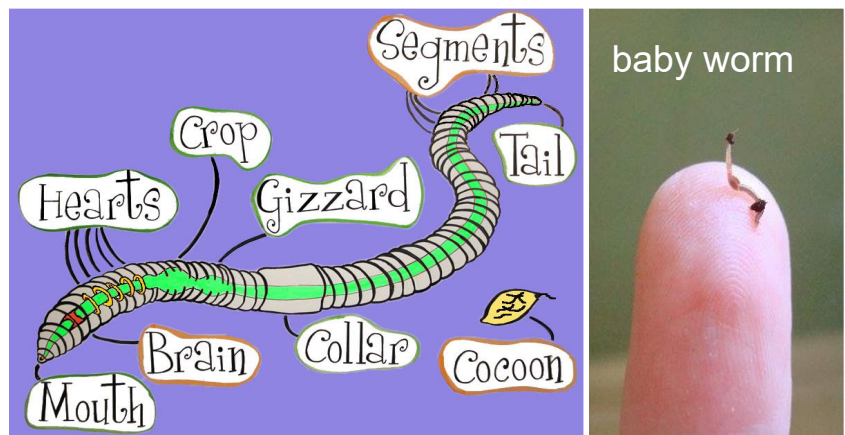
Commonly available sources of suitable bedding for your worm bin include shredded newspaper, cardboard, or computer paper, shredded leaves, and coconut coir. With newspaper, use only the regular black and white sections - not the color sections.

Whatever you use, it must be dampened. Add in some soil or grit and allow everything to rest for a couple of days before adding the worms.

The proper material to add to your bin for worm food should include any vegetables, especially leafy greens. Any fruit (except citrus!). Coffee grounds and tea bags, coffee filters, black and white newspapers, cardboard. Egg shells for grit. (Earthworms have gizzards like chickens and need grit to digest their food). Avoid citrus, fats and oils, salad dressings, bread, salt, meat, sugar, and garlic and onions. Small chunks will break down faster than large pieces. Worms eat the microbes that feed on the decaying food, not the food itself. The food will not attract them until it starts to decay. You might consider pre-composting the food. Be sure to use a tightly sealed container for this to avoid flies.

**More worm facts:** A pound of red wigglers will contain 600-800 worms. In good conditions, they can multiply quickly, doubling their number in 3 months. Earthworms are usually not self-mating although each possesses both male and female reproductive organs. A mutual exchange of sperm occurs between two worms

during mating. Mature worms will lay about 2 eggs per week. The eggs hatch in about 3 weeks with each cocoon will producing an average of 2 to 5 worms.



Are you still interested in worm composting? I hope I haven't discouraged anyone. This is just the tip of the iceberg regarding available information. I have wavered between thinking it is too much work with too many opportunities to make mistakes, to wanting to give it a try anyway. One thing is for sure, it is much more involved than what I originally imagined. I'm going to give it a try though. I'll let you know how it turns out.

[https://Vermiculture2010.pdf \(tamu.edu\)](https://Vermiculture2010.pdf (tamu.edu))

[Vermicomposting & Compost Tea \(tcmastergardeners.org\)](Vermicomposting & Compost Tea (tcmastergardeners.org))

[Home Worm Production | Archives | Aggie Horticulture \(tamu.edu\)](Home Worm Production | Archives | Aggie Horticulture (tamu.edu))



## HERBED CHEESE PUFFS

Submitted by Beth Norris, ECMG

*I attended a cooking class at HEB Central Market in Dallas a few years ago. The chef and author of the cookbook this came from is Maria Helm Sinskey.*

### INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups water  
1 ½ sticks of unsalted butter (If using salted butter, omit the addition of salt in recipe.)  
2 tsp salt (I only used 1 ¼ tsp salt-feel free to adjust to personal preference)  
1 tsp fresh rosemary finely chopped (if you must use dried, cut in half)  
2 tsp fresh thyme finely chopped (if you must use dried, cut in half)  
1 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour  
6 large eggs  
1 ½ cups Gruyere or other firm cheese, shredded  
½ cup Parmesan grated.  
Egg wash (this is optional)



### DIRECTIONS

Step 1: Bring the water, butter, and salt to boil in a medium saucepan. Add the rosemary and thyme. Remove from the heat and add the flour and stir. Return the pan to medium heat and continue to stir until batter pulls away from the side of the pan. Scrape the batter into the bowl of a standing mixer with the paddle attachment and mix a few times to begin cooling the dough. Cool dough till easy to touch-this will prevent the eggs from scrambling once they are added.

Step 2: On low speed, add the eggs one by one; after each egg is added, increase the speed of the mixer and beat until each egg is incorporated. The eggs can also be beaten in by hand. Beat well after all eggs have been added. Add the Gruyere (or other firm cheese of choice) and the Parmesan. Beat well until well incorporated.

Step 3: On a parchment lined sheet pan, using a pastry bag, pipe the batter into half dollar sized rounds. The batter can also be spooned into mounds with a tablespoon. At this point you can freeze the puffs until you are ready to bake them.

Step 4: Preheat oven to 450 degrees\*. Brush the puffs with egg wash straight from the freezer. (Omit that step if you prefer not to use the egg wash.) Bake for 40 minutes and then reduce the heat to 400 degrees and bake until puffed and golden brown. Serve warm as an appetizer.

\*Note: Oven temperatures do vary. For my own oven, I pre-heat to 400 and bake for 20 minutes or until puffed and golden brown. I also usually make them more bite sized and may account for needing to reduce my temperature and time. The half dollar sized puffs will yield about 6 or more dozen appetizers.

\*\*Note 2: Use your imagination and be creative. I've changed this recipe a bit by using sharp cheddar cheese (1.5 cups) and crisp cooked bacon-chopped and fresh finely diced chives-delicious!

## Sparkplug Takes a Nature Walk

Hi everyone,

I have reached mile 730 and am stuck in Daleville, VA for a few days as I contracted Norovirus, a common virus spread on trail through hikers, especially when in close proximity at hostels. It includes nausea/vomiting/weakness. No fun to say the least, but I am on the mend.



It has allowed me time to repair my hiking boots with shoe glue and Leukotape, which is usually used for hot spots on feet, but it is so sticky that I am loving how it helps my boots. I have a new pair of hiking shoes supposed to meet me in Harpers Ferry, WV, about 300 miles away. Fingers are crossed my current boots will make the trek.

If anyone is interested in following my trek, I started an Instagram account with many pictures; search for me at Sparkplug\_athike.

Spring has finally sprung, and the wildflowers have been amazing! And there are many species of bees out here doing their jobs as pollinators! I hike through green tunnels every day now that the deciduous trees have put on their leaves. The rhododendrons are starting to bloom, and the Mountain Laurel are beautiful shades of pinks and whites. It is so beautiful out here, and every day I just try to drink it all in as I hike, take breaks, and even when sleeping in my tent!

Oh, and while on the subject of sleeping...there is a bird that wakes up every morning about 5:45 AM. I've been told it is a Red-eyed Vireo, but I haven't confirmed that yet. All I know is that even though the sound is beautiful, it is so loud that I feel it must be sitting on my tent, and you are pretty much awake at that point whether you want to be or not! Nature starts her day early! Bedtime is early too. I'm usually in my sleeping bag by the time the sun sets around 8:30. This is called hiker's midnight out here on the trail. □

One of the recent highlights was the Grayson Highlands in Virginia where the wild ponies roam. It's not that often that you hike and see small herds of wild ponies roaming the highlands. Many were pregnant, and some had already foaled. They seem tame, as you can walk fairly close, but be forewarned...they will kick and bite if they feel threatened; they are wild of course!

Encountered my first bear a few weeks ago. It was a juvenile about 15 yards in front of me on the trail. We both just stared at each other for a moment waiting to see what the other would do next. I clicked my trekking poles together, and the bear crashed through the underbrush making a getaway. My adrenaline was coursing through my veins at that point, but logically, I know that the majority of black bears are more scared of humans, as long as they haven't connected human





smell with food...that's when problems can occur. And, that is why it is so important that hikers pack all trash and uneaten food out as well as hang bear bags properly, so bears will stick with their own natural diet. Well, that is it for now. I will check in again next month.

"Further up, Further In" CS Lewis

Take care everyone,  
Tamra (trail name Sparkplug)

