

This newsletter is written by ECMG volunteers and is published digitally in February, March, April, June, August, October and December. For questions or submissions please email: ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com.

It's Time! 23rd ANNUAL ELLIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS' LAWN AND GARDEN EXPO Saturday, March 23rd, 2024



images from 2023 Expo

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We apologize for posting the wrong answer key to last month's puzzle. The correct answer can be found on page 6 of this issue.

February Brags!

Do you have something in your garden you are proud of? Send a photo of your "brag" to ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com and we will post it here for everyone to enjoy.



My carrots are coming up! Kim R., Waxahachie



Finally getting out to my garden!
Susan K., Waxahachie



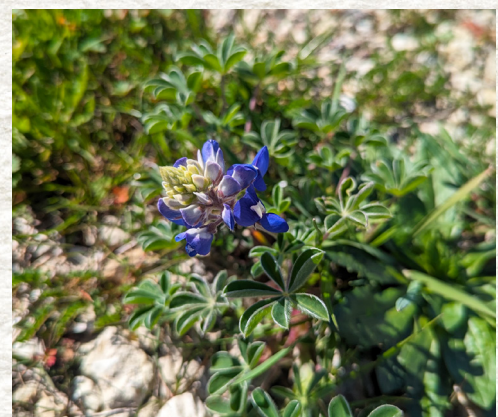
"Plants from Produce" author Paul T.,
ECMG intern.



Santa Rosa Plum from Malcolm A.,
Midlothian



Angie McK. paints
rocks and places
them in public areas
to be found and
recorded on her
Facebook page,
[OakLeafTXrocks](https://www.facebook.com/OakLeafTXrocks).



First Bluebonnet. Taken Feb. 24th by
Mary Ann M., Palmer

Send in **YOUR** labeled photos to
ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com

Behind the Scenes...

a look at the Master Gardener Expo Plant Sale

by Angie McKune, ECMG Intern

The plant sale is one of the most anticipated events at the Master Gardener Expo in Waxahachie. It is also one of the largest fundraisers for the Ellis County Master Gardeners. The Master Gardener Expo will be held on March 23, 2024, from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the Convention Center. But get there early if you want that prized plant because they go quick!

The plant sale will feature thousands of plants. You can find all types of plants from vegetables, herbs, patio, and landscape plants, including trees. Many times, you can find that hard-to-find plant you have been wanting! And, Master Gardener plants are suited to thrive here in North Texas.

So, what does it take to put on a plant sale of this size? It takes lots of behind-the-scenes work! The plant-sale preparation starts months before the Expo. Many conference calls, meetings and emails occur in the

planning. The plant sale is spearheaded by Gayle Johnston and Jackie Milan. They organize an army of Master Gardener volunteers, and these volunteers split into different committees to ensure the success of the sale. One group is assigned to purchase plants from various plant wholesalers around North Texas, and this group is led by Jackie Milan who is responsible for plant procurement. They travel to the vendors and inspect plants to determine if they meet the quality standards for the plant sale. They also must make sure that these plants will be mature enough to be sold by the time they are delivered the day before the sale. Additionally, they are responsible for negotiating the price for plants before purchase to be able to offer the best price for our community.

Gayle Johnston is responsible for the layout of the sale. Once she receives a list and sizes of plants that will be offered, she then determines the layout and traffic patterns and where plants will be located and grouped. She also



determines the number of tables that will be needed.

The plants are delivered the day before the Expo and start arriving early in the morning. Prior to bringing the plants into the sale area, plastic sheeting must be laid down to protect the floors of the convention center, and tables must be set up. Also, piping and drapes must be hung around the tables. The plants then must be labeled with the name and any information about the plant.

On Expo Day, the customer lines start forming early in the morning. There are cashiers and about 12-15 volunteers to work on the floor. They provide plant information to the customers and answer questions that the customers may have. They also help in locating a particular plant for a customer.

After the Expo closes, there is still work to be done! Everything needs to be broken down and cleaned up at closing. The volunteers spend a few hours ripping up the plastic and sweeping up dirt on the floors. They also wipe down all the tables and restore the convention center back to its original condition. At the end of the day, we have a group of exhausted volunteers. But all the hard work pays off with the satisfaction of knowing that the Ellis County Master Gardeners are providing the community with quality plants at a good price!



HAPPINESS WITH HELLEBORES

by Paul Thomas, ECMG intern



I saw a hellebore for the first time in a landscape nursery in Cedar Hill. Intrigued, and with a shady spot in mind, I bought three. They mounded up nicely after transplanting. Later, a visitor remarked, "Those are happy-looking hellebores." There are varieties as Lenten roses, which bloom in late winter/early spring, and Christmas roses, which bloom in December. They are available online in small pots, and occasionally in local nurseries.

I was hooked and have been growing a few ever since. The flowers from these plants droop, so they show better in a raised location.

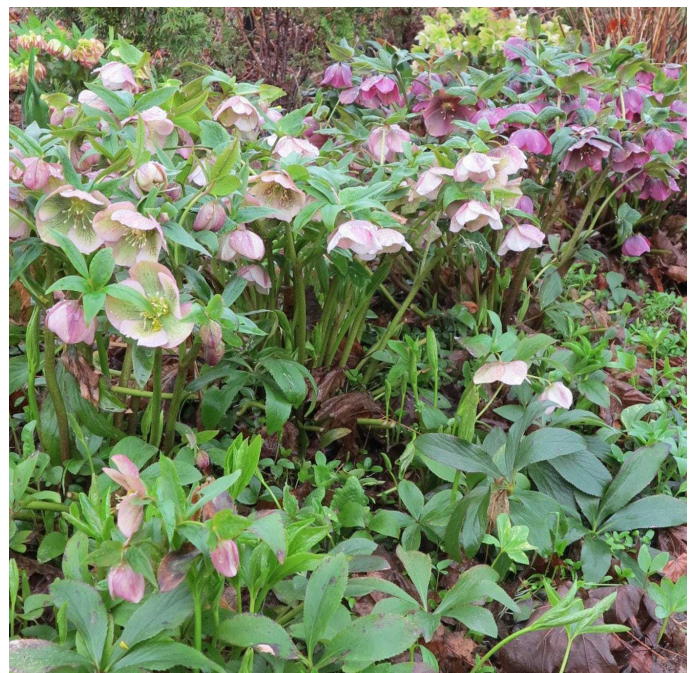
They are winter hardy and evergreen, thriving through the recent cold snap, as well as the big freeze several years ago. The one catch is that you have to be patient. Dividing is possible; transplanting is possible. However, you have to be patient. When we moved (from one house to another), I took my hellebores with me (potting them before putting the house up for sale). We moved three. Two survived. One hadn't

been doing well in the first place and didn't survive. One was down to one leaf, but that was all it needed. It's currently doing fine. So you need patience when disturbing them.

I have observed that with my two plants of the same variety, the plant with more shade grows bigger but with fewer leaves. Both have very pretty, leathery, dark green foliage with light green veins.

They are drought tolerant once established. I water with soda bottles or similar containers with pinholes drilled in them.

I have two plants currently. The one in the deeper shade has larger leaves and fewer but larger flowers. The plants like deciduous trees overhead. They like the winter sun but want to stay away from the sun most of the day in the summer. Ours lie in the northwest corner of our privacy fence, under a crepe myrtle.



The plants like neutral to alkaline soil (yeah, Ellis County!). They like plenty of well-drained soil with compost. I added expanded shale as well, because of my clay soil. Dress with compost or other organic amendment, especially in early February when the plants are putting up flower stalks.

Hellebores will grow from seed, but be careful. Some varieties are hybrids and will not be true to type grown from seed. Seeds need to be both warm and cold-stratified. The seed themselves, though I have yet to experience this. See the link below for more on propagation.

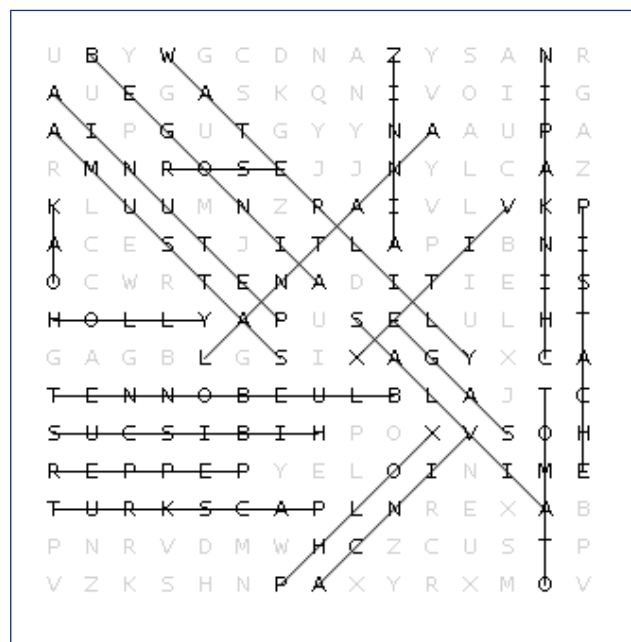
Consider for companions: ferns, hostas, Texas Gold columbines, other shade plants.



More at: [How to Grow and Care for Hellebore \(thespruce.com\)](https://thespruce.com/how-to-grow-and-care-for-hellebore)

[Lenten Rose Lives Up to its Name - Neil Sperry's GARDENS](#)

We apologize for posting the wrong answer key to last month's Word Search puzzle. Hopefully you don't need it anymore, but here it is.



Journaling dream come true



Just in time for spring planting, you can have decades of Ellis County Master Gardeners' advice, experience and knowledge at your fingertips. All in one compact package. The first edition of the ECMG Journal will be available at the Ellis County Master Gardener

Lawn and Garden Expo on March 23 at the Waxahachie Civic Center.

"The monthly gardener's companion is specific to Ellis County," said Mary Brower, who along with Alicia Wasson spearheaded the project (both are Master Gardeners). "As the title indicates, this journal is the ultimate 12-month guide filled with valuable information aiding both novice gardeners as well as those with many years of experience under their belts," Mary said.

The idea of a journal was born from a common need for year-round expert guidance in the challenging Ellis county growing environment. "Being a new gardener, I needed quick access to planting and growing information specific to Ellis county," Alicia said. "The journal is a compilation of experience from Master Gardeners in our area along with expertise from Texas A&M."

The spiral-bound 8-1/2" by 11" journal is packed with gardening information and advice on approximately 150 sturdy pages. Delightfully inspirational with color and greyscale illustrations, it details recommended monthly and seasonal gardening activities as well as showcasing a variety of wildflowers and herbs to enhance any garden.

The journal is certain to become one of the most valuable tools Ellis county gardeners can have in their gardening toolbox. Pick one up for yourself or grab several; they are perfect gifts for all Ellis county gardeners.

View a copy of the Journal at the entrance to the Plant Sale.
Pick up and pay for your copy at the Plant Sale checkout.





Would you like to win \$15 worth of plants from the Master Gardeners' Plant Sale at EXPO?

Just solve this puzzle, take a picture of your answers, and send your picture to our email address:

ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com

First correct answer WINS!

This contest is not open to former, current or intern Master Gardeners.

Just Enough Latin

There can be hundreds of common names for the same plant, or conversely, the same common name can be used for hundreds of different species. If you learn a Latin name and you see that plant again anywhere in the world, you will still know its name.

Match the Common Name to the Scientific Name. Take a picture of your answer and send it in to our email: ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com. First correct answer wins!

	Scientific Name	Your Answer		Common Name
1	Lupinus texensis		A	Blackeyed Susan
2	Hesperaloe Parviflora Rubra		B	Ti plant
3	Asclepias syriaca L		C	Bois d'arc
4	Asclepias curassavica		D	Texas Blue bonnet
5	Quercus macrocarpa		E	Burr Oak
6	Maclura pomifera		F	Red Yucca
7	Alcea rosea		G	Common Milk weed
8	Cordyline fruticosa (L.)		H	Purslane
9	Rudbeckia hirta		I	Daisy
10	Castilleja coccinea		K	Holly Hock
11	Crassula ovata		L	Prickly Pear
12	Opuntia		M	Indian Paintbrush
13	Bellis perennis		N	Mother-in-law's tongue
14	Dracaena trifasciata		O	Jade Plant
15	Portulaca oleracea		P	Mexican Butterfly weed

Planting Your New Tomato Plants



One of the things that I always look forward to during the summer is the taste of a homegrown tomato right out of my garden. You probably feel the same way and that is why you plan to buy some tomato plants at the Ellis County Master Gardener Plant Expo on March 23 at the Waxahachie Civic Center.

If you are new to growing tomatoes in Texas or have not been happy with your results, here are a few things to consider to ensure that you have a good crop.

🍅 **First**, there two categories of tomato plants.

Determinate plants have an expected size and growing pattern, will not necessarily need staking but can be staked, and they bear fruit at a specific time.

Indeterminate plants are more often vining, have no definite size or shape, will usually need a trellis to grow on, and bear fruit all season long.

🍅 **Second**, if you expect great tomatoes, they need well-draining soil and will need additional fertilizing during the growing season. Additional fertilizing starts when the first fruits reach about 1 inch in size and then every four weeks after that.

🍅 **Third**, your tomato-growing success depends on how you plant the tomatoes.

It may sound illogical, but your tomatoes should be planted slightly deeper than where they are in the pot. Very small plants can be planted at current soil depth while medium plants should be planted an additional 2 to 3 inches below soil level after pinching off the bottom leaves. Larger plants (particularly the indeterminate varieties) can be planted deeper by bending the stem in an “L”



shape on the bottom of your hole after the leaves on the plant below ground level have been removed. It may sound wrong, but tomatoes are all essentially vines and will happily grow more roots on the buried stems to increase their ability to reach water and nutrients.

🍅 **Fourth**, tomatoes need water.

If you leave a shallow depression around your tomato's stem, it will help channel water to the plant. Tomatoes need to be watered slowly and deeply. How often depends on the temperature, wind, and amount of direct summer sun. Inadequate water will result in withered plants and small fruit. I purchased a moisture meter to help.

A caution is important here: **do not water your tomatoes from the top.** Tomatoes get a fungal disease called early tomato

blight. The blight fungus overwinters in the soil and overhead watering causes the spores to be splashed up onto the lower leaves. Once the blight starts showing itself, it is very hard to control. I will follow up with a later article explaining how to control the blight. I have found that laying a soaker hose alongside my tomatoes works well and can be put on a timer.

🍅 **Fifth**, support your plants.

Tomato plants can make some very heavy fruit (we all hope) and will need

some help supporting them.

Determinate tomatoes can be supported with a commercial tomato cage, think bigger = better. You can make a cage out of reinforcing wire by cutting a section and bending it into a cylinder. I have also made a support out of old bamboo canes and tied the tomato limbs to the canes.

Indeterminate tomatoes are going to need additional support beyond the cages. I plant my indeterminate tomatoes so that they will have additional reinforcing wire to climb.



Good luck with your tomatoes and may yours have so many fruit that you will have to share your abundance.



The Lawn & Garden EXPO always offers great tomato seedlings. Shop early for the best selection.

Additional Resource: from Aggie-Horticulture

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/09/EHT-043.pdf>