TEXAS MASTER GARDENER
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
ELLIS COUNTY

E-Gardening Newsletter

Volume XI, Issue 4
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April 2024

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

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THE 2024 LAWN & GARDEN EXPO IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR

- 52 Vendors.
- The Children's Workshop served over 200 children.
- Vendors and Master Gardeners consumed 50 pizzas for lunch.
- Over 2,000 attended.

Click Here to view Photos of the event. pg 4-5

April 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1 Ennis Bluebonnet Trails begins	2	3	4	5	6 **Farmers Markets begin:** Ennis Bluebonnet Market & Waxahatchie Farmers Market Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival
7 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival	8 **Total Eclipse** Ennis, Midlothian & Waxahatchie all have watch events planned	9	10	11	12	13 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival; Midlothian Chamber of Commerce Wine, Arts, & Craft Brew Festival
14 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival	15	16	17	18	19 Ennis, 40th annual Bluebonnet Festival begins	20 **Earth Day** Midlothian Wildflower Walks 9-11am Mockingbird Park
21 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival	22	23	24	25	26	27 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival
28 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival Prairie Wildlife & Wildflower Adventure 2-4pm Ellis Co Rural Heritage Farm	29	30 Ennis Bluebonnet Trails ends				

May 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Saturday
28	29	30	1	2 Vintage Market Days begin Waxahachie Civic Center	4 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival
5 **Cinco de Mayo** Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival; Vintage Market Days end	6	7	8	9	11 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival
12 **Mother's Day** Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival	13	14	15	16	18 Midlothian Wildflower Walks 9-11 Mockingbird Park
19 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival	20	21	22	23	25 Waxahatchie Scarborough Festival
26 Waxahatchie Scarborough Renaissance Festival; Ennis Polka Festival ends	27 **Memorial Day** Scarborough Renaissance Festival ends	28	29	30	1

Opening Day - April 6th
Waxahachie Downtown Farmer's Market

by Angie McKune

Looking for something to do on a Saturday morning? Did you know the City of Waxahachie hosts a Farmers Market? The Farmer's Market has been closed these last few months for renovations but will open every Saturday starting April 6th, 2024, from 8-1. The Farmer's Market will be open year around with reduced hours during the Wintertime. They anticipate 45 booths this year with the possibility of adding more booths next year!

The Farmers Market offers local vegetable growers, art and handmade crafts. All crafts and art must be handcrafted by the vendor. They plan to offer monthly events this year such as classes offered by vendors. They hope to add more food trucks!

There is also a Master Gardener booth staffed by the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association. They have handouts for you to take home and are there to answer all your questions related to gardening in Ellis County!

The Farmer's Market is located at 701 Howard Road in Waxahachie, Texas next to the dog park. Well behaved and leashed dogs are welcome!

For vendor information you can contact Eleana Tuley at 469-309-4111. Also don't forget to follow the Farmer's Market on Facebook and Instagram for all the updates!

Hope
To See
You There!

LOOKING AT EXPO 2024

CHILDRENS WORKSHOP


INDOOR BUG CONTROL
OUTDOOR BUG REPELLENT
Fruit Fly Remedy


exas Bluebird So


VENDORS


WAXAHACHIE
INDIANS


Jams, Jellies, and More
of Waxahachie, Texas


#4 Proper Planting


sassin or Wheel Bug

SPEAKERS

THE MAGIC of the Lotus

Bring a bit of Asia into your container gardens with a lotus plant.

This is a stunning, fuss-free plant producing eye-catching blooms and foliage. It performs great in the Texas summers and overwinters easily. And the best part, in a container, it is easily maintained in exchange for its exotic beauty.
The lotus grows from rhizomes or tubers submerged in water and produces a single spectacular flower per stalk in colors ranging from white, cream, and yellow, to pinks, reds and, more rarely, purple and blue. Depending on the plant, some blooms are tiny and delicate, while others are as large as your hand. Although the brilliant flower lasts for only several days, opening during the day and closing at night, it is rewarding to grow and requires little maintenance in the Texas climate beyond fertilizing it during the growing season and keeping water in the container.

An important point to know about the lotus is that it is not the same plant as a water lily. They are often confused with each other, but they are two separate plants. The water lily (Latin name nymphaeaceae) is native to North America while the lotus (nelumbo) is native to eastern and southern Asia and Australia. They both are hardy plants and grow well in Ellis county (USDA zone 8b).

Both are water-logged plants that look similar, but there are differences between them. One of the most noticeable is where the leaf and flower grow. The lotus leaves and flowers rise above the water level on aerial stems. In contrast, the water lily's leaves and flowers float on the water's surface. Lotus leaves have a thin, papery feel while the water lily appears waxy. The leaf shape is also different. The lotus leaves are round and some have a ruffled edge, while the water lily has a distinctive notch or slit from the edge to the center, creating what has been described as a heart shape.

It is possible to start a lotus from seed, but it is easier to plant the tuber. Tubers can be ordered online and they are shipped during in the spring, which is the best time to start them. It is safe to plant the tuber when the temperatures do not fall below 50 degrees. Generally, it is not recommended to start them in a greenhouse because too early of a start can cause the plant to struggle later. It is also important to note that the first year there may not be many blooms, but as the plant ages, the number of blooms increases each year.

Coin leaves: The first leaves to appear after planting are the coin leaves, so named because of their round sh apes. They rest on the water's surface and begin the plant's growing process.

To prepare a container for a lotus, you'll need the following:

- A round container with no drainage holes.
- Potting media, such as silty loam, topsoil (purchased in bags at a garden center), or soil specifically for aquatic plants (sold in bags at the garden center). Do not use regular potting soil because it is too light and will float in the water.
- Aquatic plant fertilizer and water.

Select a container based on the mature size of the lotus. Small lotus plants do well in small, wide, but shallow containers. Deep containers are best for large plants. As an example, a tiny lotus will be fine in a pot with an 8-inch diameter, and a large lotus will need a 20- to 48-inch diameter container such as a plastic half barrel. Round-shaped containers are the best choice. As the tubers grow and multiply, they will grow in a circular pattern instead of becoming compacted in a corner.

Lotus in pot: It is easy to grow a lotus in a container and it thrives well in the Texas climate.

Choose a location for the container. It should be where the plant will receive at least 6 hours of sunshine daily. If using a large container, position it in its final location before planting the tuber. Once the container is filled with water, it will be heavy and unwieldy to move.

Prepare the container by putting several inches of soil in it. Add enough water to cover the soil by at least 2 to 3 inches. If it is a large container, more water will be added later as the plant grows. (Tip: wait for a couple hours to let the soil settle in the water before planting the tuber. This way the water will be clear and it will be easy to see the tuber placement.)

Lotus flower as opening: The lotus flower is vibrant when partially open or in full bloom.

Submerge the tuber in the soil making sure the growing tips are pointed upward, but do not bury the tips. The tips should be exposed but underwater. Now comes the wait. Within several days or so, its first leaves, called coin leaves, will appear. Coin leaves tend to float on the water's surface, and they begin the process for the season's growth. During this time, continue to replenish the water as needed to maintain the 2- to 3-inch coverage. Several days to a week or so later, aerial leaves will sprout. It will look like a stem with a rolled leaf at the tip. At this point, raise the water level to near the top of the container (even if it submerges the aerial leaf), and begin fertilizing the plant, following the instructions on the fertilizer label. Mosquitoes are not an issue using a periodic treatment, such as Mosquito Dunk.

And, in a nutshell, that is it. Throughout the growing season, continue to fertilize according to the label instructions and maintain the water level in the pot (for me, I usually add water about once a month during the hottest part of the summer). At the end of the growing season, the stalks will dry out and the foliage will die back. You'll have lovely distinctive dried seed pods to collect (if desired). Through the winter, it may need some extra water from time to time to maintain the water level, but usually it is maintenance free. The next summer, expect to see those aerial stems sprout again, for another round. It will not be long before beautiful lotus flowers become another attraction to your garden's beauty.

A Test of a Soil Testing Kit

I wanted to know how my organic fertilizing program was doing on a garden I had started in March, 2021 after we moved to Waxahachie.

The 4 foot by 8 foot garden had not been fertilized since early October, 2023. I had been growing tomato and pepper plants there, and the plants had done okay despite a hot, dry summer.

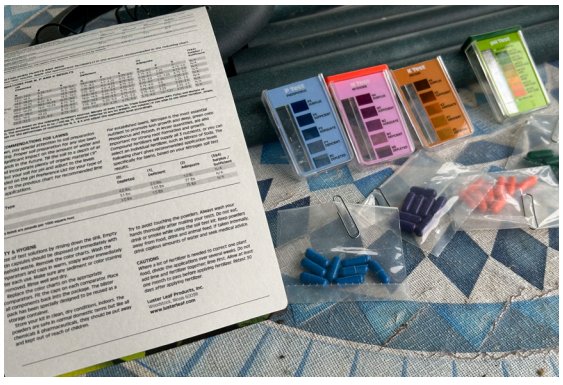
So I decided to see if a locally bought big box hardware store sample kit would suffice for testing. I used the Texas A&M soil testing service as a standard.

To do your own test, you can link to the Texas A&M soil testing service: https://soiltesting.tamu.edu/. Once you get on the web page, click on "Sampling and Shipping Instructions. Basically, the service instructs you to take 8 to 10 six-inch core samples, mix everything, removing any non-decomposed organic material, and put 2-3 cups into a quart-sized zip lock bag. Pay online ($12 per test), enclose the receipt, label the bag, and mail everything to the soil testing service. I mailed two tests, including one from the lawn, and the postage cost me $10.

Results of the Texas A&M test.

Analysis	Results	CL*	Units	ExLow VLow Low Mod High VHigh Excess.	
pH	7.5	(6.5)	-	Slightly Alkaline	
Conductivity	177	(-)	umho/cm	None CL*	Fertilizer Recommended
Nitrate-N	5	(-)	ppm**		1.2 lbs N/1000sqft
Phosphorus	174	(50)	ppm		0 lbs P2O5/1000sqft
Potassium	632	(175)	ppm		0 lbs K20/1000sqft
Calcium	6,530	(180)	ppm		0 lbs Ca/1000sqft
Magnesium	632	(50)	ppm		0 lbs Mg/1000sgft
Sulfur	69	(13)	ppm		0 lbs S/1000sqft
Sodium	138	(-)	ppm		
Iron					
Zinc					
Manganese					
Copper					
Boron					
Limestone Requirement					0.00 lbs/1000sqft

*CL=Critical level is the point which no additional nutrient (excluding nitrate-N, sodium and conductivity) is recommended. **ppm=mg/kg



The hardware store bought test kit used colorimetry. The name of the product is Rapitest. (*Specific product brands are not endorsed by ECMG Texas A&M, and Texas A&M Agrlife Extension Service.*) This test contains four rectangular testing containers, each with two divisions: one for a sample plus reagent, and one for a control. The package looks like this:

For nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, the kit

instructs you to take a single sample 3+ inches deep and to mix the soil with distilled water. Since I knew that our local clay soil doesn't mix very well, or even fit in the container, I also lightly pulverized the sample with a wooden mortar in a stone pestle, removing expanded shale, roots, etc. The soil testing service also pulverizes, so on this score, I was matching "like with like" in my comparison. I allowed the sample solution to settle overnight.

Finally, on the control side of a sample container, I added sample water to a line on the control partition, then sample water to another line in the test partition, then added reagent, then capped and shook, then waited the time specified to read the color of the sample from a color chart.

pH measurement was different and uses actual soil in the test division.

I found that color matching was difficult. I tried various lighting conditions and background colors until I found something that would match.

Here are my results.

	pH	Nitrogen	Phosphorus	K -Potash
Texas A&M soil testing	Slightly alkaline	ExLow	VHigh	VHigh
Rapitest	Neutral to alkaline	Adequate	Adequate	Depleted

d

With the big box store test, the gradations are for N, P, and K in order:

- Depleted
- Deficient
- Adequate
- Sufficient
- Excess

Comments:

- It was difficult to get any color match at all. Indeed, it was very difficult to get any color at all, and when it did, for N, the result should have been "depleted" if it was going to match the A & M soil testing service results.
- As you can see, there was no agreement with the soil testing service results. What I might have been seeing were year-old or more reagents that were simply no longer reacting or reacting in an unexpected way. Given the number of very favorable reviews at an online website, I think that this is most likely the case. Indeed, there were a few reviews that reacted similarly.
- The pH may just not have been registering anything. It was more gray than a shade of green that I would have expected.
- Handling the testing containers and the reagent capsules were difficult for my shaky hands. One reviewer had a good idea: to tape the containers down. The reagent capsules were supposed to come apart so the reagent could pour into the container. They were stuck together. Instead, I had to snip them on one end. These

are more indications of aged reagents.

- The package said there are 40 tests. Well, really, there are ten comprehensive tests, with N, P, K and pH having 10 tests each. The package recommends taking several samples, testing each sample separately. So really, in comparing costs with those of the soil test service, there are significantly fewer tests than one might be led to expect from the package.

Conclusions:

Buying a soil testing product from a big box store may not give you dependable results. Purchasing from an online retailer, where the reagents may be more current could be a better idea.

I went back to check the big box store website. Rapitest no longer seems to be carried. This may be due to normal product rotation. It does indicate that I bought a product that had been discontinued or was about to be. That reinforces my opinion that I was using old reagents.

March Brags

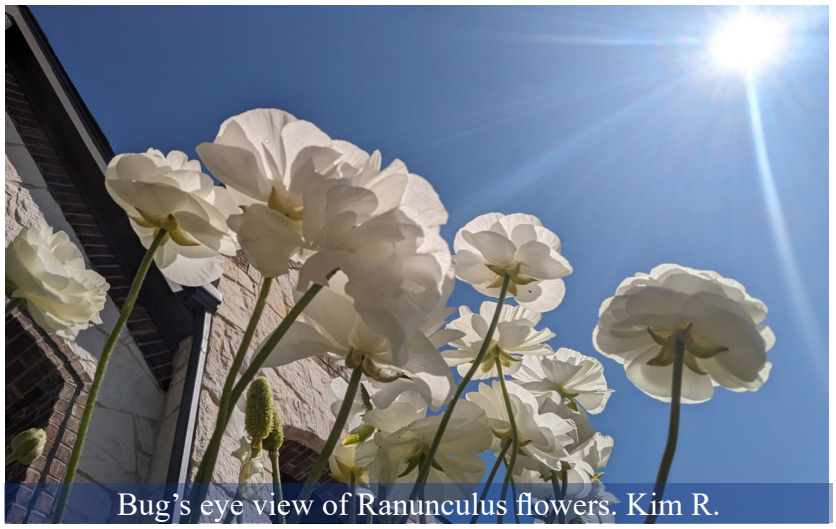
Do you have something in your garden you are proud of? Send a photo of your "brag" to ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com and we will post it here for everyone to enjoy.

Mollie's Delicious Apple blossom, planted bare root this winter. Ann N.

Single rose bloom. Teresa B.
(A rose described as a "single" has between 4-8 petals.)

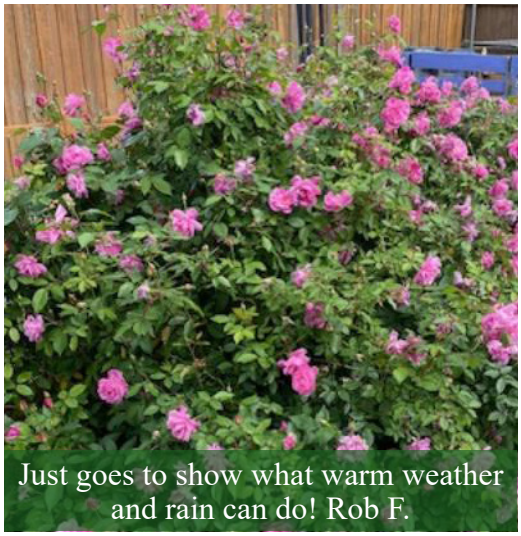
Continued on next page!

Snapdragons, grown from seed planted in December. Donna S.


Bug's eye view of Ranunculus flowers. Kim R.


Hellibore make long lasting cut flowers. Arranged by Barbara T.


Onions!! Angie McK.


Just goes to show what warm weather and rain can do! Rob F.


My Aloe preparing to bloom! Dixie G.


Crossvine blooming now! Susan K.

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