

MAY & JUNE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Ellis County Farmers' Markets

Waxahachie

Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
 701 Howard Road
 Master Gardener booth
 every Saturday. Come and
 say "Hi!" or ask questions
 about your plants or yards.

Midlothian

Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
 Heritage Park, Historic
 Downtown by the Larkin
 Newton log cabin.

Ennis

Bluebonnet Market
Saturdays, 8 a.m. to Noon
 100 N. Dallas St., Ennis
 Master Gardener booth on
 the first Saturday of each
 month.

May 12
10-11:30 a.m.
FREE

Green Thumb Gardening: Some Like it Hot. Grow and care for drought-tolerant plants and better manage our urban water resources. <https://hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register>

May 17, 9 a.m.

Wildflower walk, Mockingbird Park, Midlothian
 Hosted by Indian Trails Master Naturalists

May 31
 check-in: 8:45 a.m.

Kids Fishing Derby - Registration Required
<https://www.midlothian.tx.us/447/Kids-Fishing-Derby>

June 7-8

Gingerbread Trail Tour of Homes - 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
 One of our oldest and most beloved annual events that has been
 Waxahachie tradition for 55 years.
 More details or tickets:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/waxahachie-gingerbread-trail-tour-of-homes-2025-tickets-1224238894489>

June 21, 9 a.m.

Wildflower walk, Mockingbird Park, Midlothian
 Hosted by the Indian Hills Master Naturalists

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Photo Recall • Expo 25



PICKING HERITAGE FRUIT TREES AND VINES FOR BEAUTY AND FOOD

by Rob Franks, ECMG

When settlers were coming to Texas, they often brought plants that were familiar, including fruit trees and fruiting vines. They were also greeted by native fruit trees and vines. During the Depression and World War II, many people planted gardens to supplement their food resources, which included fruit trees and vines.

Many old homes still have heritage plants on their property, and it is those trees and vines that I am going to cover in a series over the next few issues in this newsletter. Who knows? You may find a plant or two that you want to try in the fall.

Heritage fruit trees and vines come in a variety of growth habits and types of fruit. These include: maypop, Nanking cherry, loquat (Japanese plum), chokeberry, sorb apple, buffalo berry, sand plum, elderberry, currants, crabapple, mulberry, persimmon, gooseberry, Juneberry quince, and pawpaw. Some of these you may recognize and some may be new to you, as they were to me.

The maypop plant is a fruit-bearing vine also called a passion flower. This is a perennial vine that returns every year. It is very tolerant of soil, water, and sunlight differences, blooms from March through November under optimum conditions, provides food for butterflies and birds, and bears edible fruit. Native people used the root to treat boils and bruises. The fruit will drop once it is ripe and the pulp around the seeds is sweet.



The Nanking cherry is a bush cherry (actually closer to a plum) that tolerates different well-drained soils and loves full sun. The bush can grow to 9 feet tall and is drought and cold resistant. The berries ripen in early summer full of antioxidants, nature's own defense against cellular damage. Flavonoids in the seeds outperform even ascorbic acid in fighting off free radicals.



The loquat (Japanese plum) are more tropical and need full sun and may need protection during extreme cold weather. They can grow up to 25 feet tall. They are high in essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals and fiber. The fruit tastes like a pear or apple and contains its own pectin, so no additional pectin is needed for canning. Loquat fruit is good to eat while trying to lose weight. Vitamin A promotes eyesight, especially night vision, helps maintain healthy teeth, immune system, and skeletal and soft tissue (skin and membranes around organs). It also contains vitamins B6 and B12, potassium, and manganese.



The chokeberry needs well-drained soil, full to partial shade, and can grow up to 10 feet tall. During the first year and during dry periods, the chokeberry needs a gallon of water per week. While chokeberry has good antioxidant properties, in large quantities there are mild side effects like dry mouth, constipation and diarrhea, especially in large quantities. They may also interact with certain medications, such as blood thinners and diabetes drugs.

Sorb apple (service tree) produces a sweet fruit that is similar to an apple or pear. The tree can grow up to 50 feet tall, prefers full sun, is not too picky of soils as long as they are well drained. Fruit ripens in late fall and becomes sweet and tasty after it has been stored and allowed to slowly ripen. It has been used along with apples to make cider. Like apples, the seeds contain hydrogen cyanide and should not be eaten.



Buffalo berry is an American native and the berries were pounded with buffalo meat to make pemmican. The berries are best eaten after the first frost. The trees themselves are rather thorny and protection, like elbow-length leather gloves, from the thorns is needed while harvesting. Like most native plants, the buffalo berry will thrive in poor soil and difficult growing conditions, including drought, heat and cold, once established.

I hope that this has piqued your interest and in the July newsletter, I will cover the sand plum, elderberry, currants, crabapples, mulberry, and persimmon.

I will also provide information on where to purchase the plants online, locally, and nearby and how to plant your plants.

For more information on growing your own fruits and nuts can be found at <https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/assets/plants-crops/crops-produce/fruits-tree-nuts/>

GINGERBREAD TRAIL TOUR OF HOMES

Date: June 7 - June 8, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Ticket sales:

[Waxahachie Gingerbread Trail Tour of Homes 2025](#)



Step into the heart of Waxahachie's charm during the 55th Annual Gingerbread Trail Tour of Homes! This beloved event celebrates the city's rich history and stunning architecture, offering a unique glimpse into what makes the "Gingerbread City" so special.

Event Highlights:

- **Win a Heritage Quilt** - Purchase a raffle ticket for your chance to win a stunning quilt donated by a museum enthusiast! All raffle ticket sales benefit the Ellis County Museum.
- **Historic Home Tours** - Visit this year's lineup of beautifully preserved and restored homes. 2025 Historic Homes Lineup: **900 Bryson St., 502 W Marvin Ave., 512 N. College St., 515 N. College St., 911 E. Marvin St.**
- **Museum Access** - Delve into Waxahachie's rich past with museum exhibits.
- **VIP Mimosa Party** - Sip some bubbly before you skip the line as a VIP, with this exclusive experience. VIP ticket purchase required.
- **BONUS TOURS:** The Texas Theater, Meat Church, First Methodist Church, Sims Library, Historic Ellis County Courthouse Tours, Chautauqua Auditorium
- **NEW FOR 2025** - Echoes of The Past Paranormal Tour

Gingerbread Trail tours of the Butterfly and Learning Gardens

Gardens will be staffed by Master Gardeners for this event.



(no tickets required for garden visits)

A Brief History of the Waxahachie Butterfly Garden

by Cheryl Sandoval, Emeritus and Marilyn Nash, ECMG

In the beginning...

The intern class of 2009 was given a project -- install a public butterfly garden. At that time, it was certainly hard to imagine this becoming what it is today.



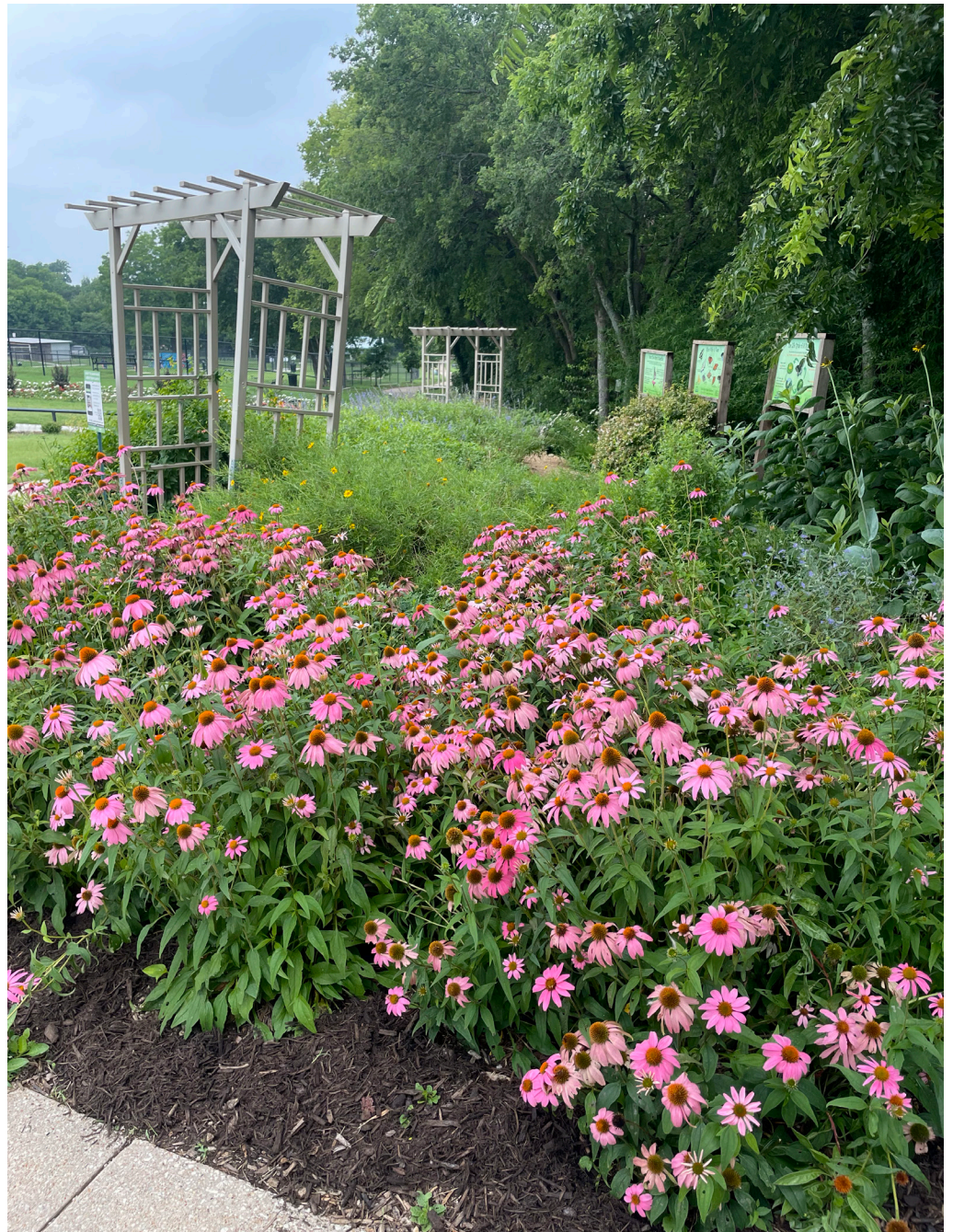
While the site has some preferred features for a butterfly garden, the soil condition was not one of them! We added expanded shale, soil, compost, and, after the plants were in, mulch.

No this wasn't an intentional pose! These are five new Master Gardeners working hard and wondering what they got themselves into!



Fast forward to 2025 and WOW, the garden is thriving! Several of the plants put in early on are still thriving today. They include Gregg's Bluemist, Autumn Sage, May Night Salvia, Frogfruit, Skeleton Leaf Goldeneye and Frostweed.

In April, six Master Gardeners came out to the Butterfly Garden along the hike and bike trail in Waxahachie. The focus was on fixing the drip system before all the plants wake up from their sleepy winter state to spring up and bloom. What a surprise we got! Nope, the butterflies haven't appeared yet. But Daniel from the Waxahachie Parks & Recreation department showed up to do the same task we were going to do. How wonderful is that? Plus he had all the parts needed to fix two major leaks and numerous smaller issues with the various broken sprinkler heads. Seeing everything work, finally, was wonderful! We got to tweak the placement of some of the heads, so now our annual flowers will get a drink.



Plus Daniel passed along a few tips to keep things working properly. We can't thank him enough. Be sure to stop by soon to see what butterflies visit the garden.

Now the soil is alive with the nutrients needed to feed the plants. The plants, in turn, feed the many pollinators that visit the garden.

It's a wonderful relationship!

Slithering Garden Helpers

by Teresa Brown, ECMG

Despite their bad rap, snakes play an important role in the ecosystem and the garden. They are nature's pest-control service, keeping insects and rodents, like rats and mice, in check. Without snakes, vermin could exponentially increase as well as the diseases they carry. Snakes are also prey animals, providing a food source for hawks, owls, roadrunners, opossums, foxes, and many other animals.

There's a good chance that while working in the garden, one will see a snake hiding among the leaves, grass and shrubs. When spying a snake, often the first thought is whether it's dangerous, and that's a valid concern. **Of Texas' 76 species of snakes (105 counting subspecies), there are only four venomous species.** Even though the chances are greater of seeing a nonvenomous one, for safety's sake, it is necessary to recognize if a snake is venomous. And since there are only four, it's a lot easier to identify them than trying to remember 100-plus harmless ones.

Venomous snakes

Texas' four species (15 subspecies) of venomous snakes are rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, copperheads and the Texas coral snake. The first three are known as pit vipers. The term refers to the heat-sensing pit or depression found on each side of the snake's face, more precisely located between the eye and nostril. The coral snake is not a pit viper; it is in the Elapidae family. Snakes in this family are characterized by having short, fixed fangs in the front of their mouths as opposed to retractable or grooved fangs.

When identifying snakes, there is no single reliable characteristic that can be used. Instead, take time to familiarize yourself with each species' distinctive markings.

Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*)

There are three subspecies of copperheads in Texas. These snakes are somewhat colorful; they have reddish-brown markings against a light-colored body. The distinctive markings are often described as resembling Hersey's chocolate candy kisses along their bodies. These snakes are not large with some adults reaching 30 inches in length.



Photo by Escho, iNaturalist, and retrieved from www.inaturalist.org/observations/119096307

Cottonmouth also known as water moccasin (Agkistrodon piscivorus)

These snakes tend to be found near water, marshes, rivers and ponds and when agitated, they display a gaping white mouth, hence their name. A cottonmouth is a heavy-bodied snake with a dark band along the side of its face and across its eyes. When young, their pixelated bands are easier to see, but as they age, the body can look black or dark brown and the bands are hard to see. The head is flat and looking at it from over its head, the eyes cannot be seen. It can reach up to 3-1/2 feet in length.

Photo by Jorge Aguilera, iNaturalist, and retrieved from <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/194863070>

**Rattlesnake**

There are two genus groups of rattlesnakes, Sistrurus and Crotalus. The Western diamondback (Crotalus atrox) is the most commonly found in most of Texas. It has clear diamond-shaped markings on its back as well as “buttons” or segments at the end of its tail that can make a rattling sound. On the tail preceding the buttons are black and white colored bands.



Photo by huntermcclain1019, iNaturalist, and retrieved from <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/269555880>

Coral snake (Micrurus fulvius tener)

The Texas coral snake is in the Elapidae family and it is the only one in the state. The snake is small -- 2-1/2 feet or smaller. It is brightly colored usually with rings of black, yellow, and red. The yellow bands always frame the red ones. It's important to note that there are several harmless snakes with similar color bands, but with those snakes, the yellow does not touch the red.

While looking at the color bands is useful, there are instances where color variations can skew them, making identification solely based on color impossible. For this reason, some snake experts discourage using mnemonic color rhymes to distinguish coral snakes from harmless ones (e.g., red touch black, venom lack). Additionally, the rhyme can be recalled inaccurately, which can be hazardous. Instead, they recommend also using other identifiers: the snake's blunt-shaped head that is slightly wider than its neck, a shiny body that is the same diameter for almost its entire length, no red is on its head nor its tail, and the color bands encircle the body completely (it has the same pattern on the belly as on the back).

Graphic by “What kind of snake is this? North Texas Educational Group” Facebook.



Any time one is not certain, the safest rule is to not handle snakes. It's no secret that most bites are the result of attempting to handle them or just not seeing them. It's best to never put a hand or foot somewhere you cannot see, such as in thick underbrush or under debris. If a snake is seen, slowly back away and let it go about its business. If you don't like where it's at, a gentle spraying from a water hose will usually move it along without anyone getting hurt.

If relocation is an absolute necessity, there are several facts to consider. First, it's illegal to relocate snakes (or any wild animal) without the expressed permission from the Texas Parks & Wildlife department. In fact, many snakes are protected and killing them could be illegal. Additionally, improper relocation can mean a death sentence for the animal. Snakes (and other wildlife) know their territory, where food, shelter and water will be found. Moving them into an unfamiliar place means they will not know where to find these life-essential resources. The good news is there's a Facebook group with a directory of approved relocators. There is also an excellent medical resource available in case a bite occurs. But, hopefully, armed with information and caution, these resources won't be needed.

References:

Free Snake Relocation Directory – As the name implies, volunteers offer their services to humanely relocate snakes for free.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/262485500985003>

National Snakebite Support – <https://www.nationalsnakebitesupport.org> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/987850051297436> This Facebook group is operated by doctors and veterinarians who are snakebite treatment experts. They offer free medical treatment advice for anyone (human and pet) bitten by a pit viper or coral snake in the United States. Please note that due to the urgent, private medical nature of the posts, it is a strictly managed, read-only group. It is not a discussion group and breaking posting rules even once will result in a permanent ban.

Texas Parks & Wildlife –

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/texas-junior-naturalists/snakes-alive/snakes-alive>

What kind of snake is this? North Texas Educational Group (operated by Nature's Wildlife and Reptile Rescue) – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/606404222703136>

This Facebook group is an excellent resource to identify snakes.

Source material

National Library of Medicine. (2023). Coral snake toxicity.

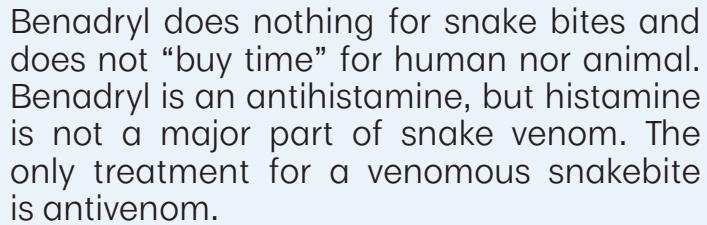
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519031>

National Snakebite Support. (2024). Benadryl will not help a snakebite.

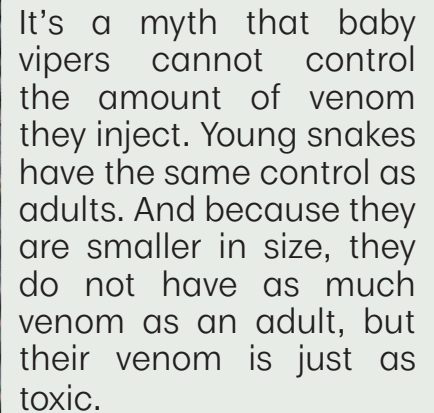
<https://www.nationalsnakebitesupport.org/nss-snakebite-management-education/benadryl-ineffective-for-snakebite>

Texas Parks & Wildlife. (2025). Venomous snake safety. <https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/texas-junior-naturalists/be-nature-safe/venomous-snake-safety>

Texas Parks & Wildlife, The State of Water. (n.d.). Northern Pineywoods, Western cottonmouths. http://www.texasthestateofwater.org/screening/pdf_docs/fact_sheets/western_cottonmouth.pdf

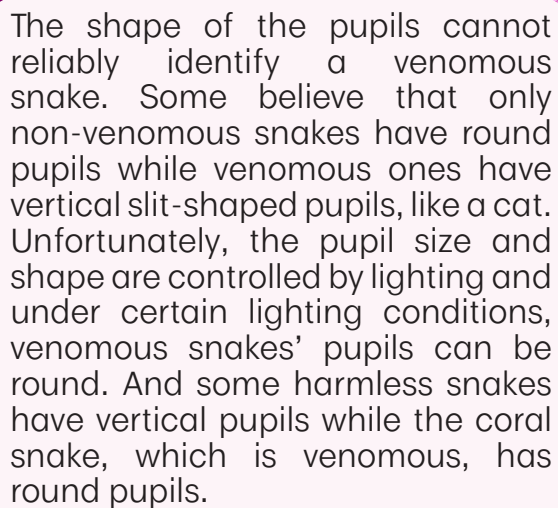


Benadryl does nothing for snake bites and does not “buy time” for human nor animal. Benadryl is an antihistamine, but histamine is not a major part of snake venom. The only treatment for a venomous snakebite is antivenom.

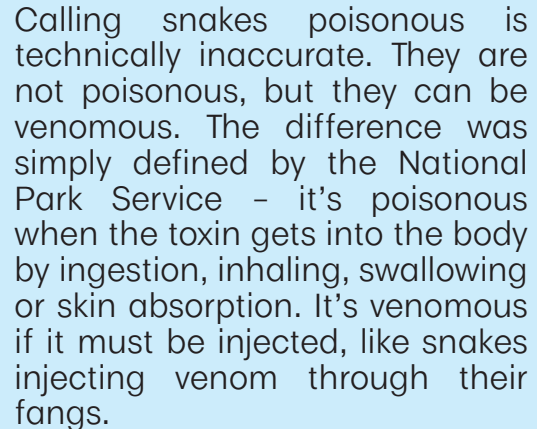


It's a myth that baby vipers cannot control the amount of venom they inject. Young snakes have the same control as adults. And because they are smaller in size, they do not have as much venom as an adult, but their venom is just as toxic.

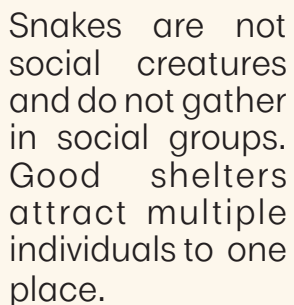
SNAKY FUN FACTS. DID YOU KNOW...



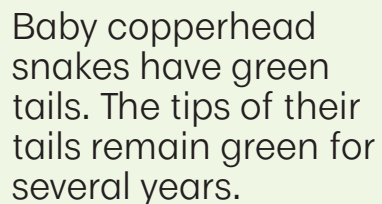
The shape of the pupils cannot reliably identify a venomous snake. Some believe that only non-venomous snakes have round pupils while venomous ones have vertical slit-shaped pupils, like a cat. Unfortunately, the pupil size and shape are controlled by lighting and under certain lighting conditions, venomous snakes' pupils can be round. And some harmless snakes have vertical pupils while the coral snake, which is venomous, has round pupils.



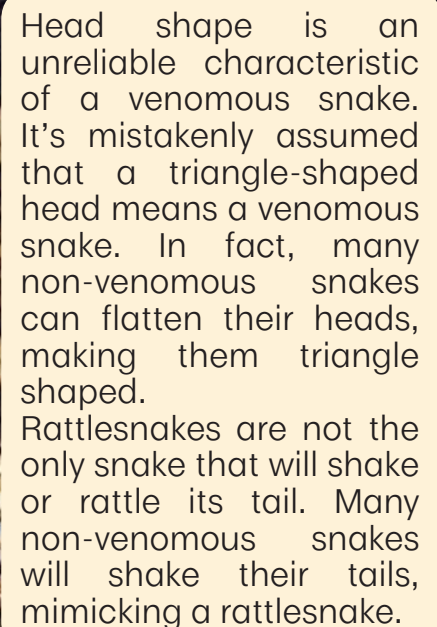
Calling snakes poisonous is technically inaccurate. They are not poisonous, but they can be venomous. The difference was simply defined by the National Park Service – it's poisonous when the toxin gets into the body by ingestion, inhaling, swallowing or skin absorption. It's venomous if it must be injected, like snakes injecting venom through their fangs.



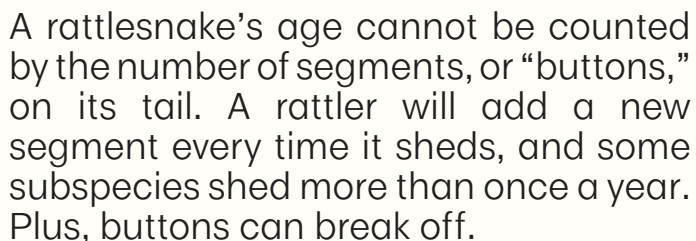
Snakes are not social creatures and do not gather in social groups. Good shelters attract multiple individuals to one place.



Baby copperhead snakes have green tails. The tips of their tails remain green for several years.



Head shape is an unreliable characteristic of a venomous snake. It's mistakenly assumed that a triangle-shaped head means a venomous snake. In fact, many non-venomous snakes can flatten their heads, making them triangle shaped. Rattlesnakes are not the only snake that will shake or rattle its tail. Many non-venomous snakes will shake their tails, mimicking a rattlesnake.



A rattlesnake's age cannot be counted by the number of segments, or “buttons,” on its tail. A rattler will add a new segment every time it sheds, and some subspecies shed more than once a year. Plus, buttons can break off.

TASTY SUMMER HACK FOR CUTWORM CONTROL

by Paul Thomas, ECMG

When you dig in native soil, you may encounter curved semi-transparent insect larvae the size of your pinky. These voracious critters like to emerge and eat young plant stems, neatly cutting the plant down at ground level. Thus, they are called “cutworms.”

And that healthy tomato seedling that you transplanted a few days ago, it could be a target. You'll know when you inspect your plant in the morning and the entire above ground part of the plant is laying on its side, shriveling up with no connection to the ground.

And so, here's a “**sweet**” hack to prevent them from cutting down your transplants.

Bonus: if you have chickens, they will consider the cutworms a treat. Read on if your yard is chicken-free.

Protect your transplants from cutworms by putting a gallon ice cream container around it as a barrier. Here's the easy procedure:

1. Use 1- to 2-gallon ice cream containers. (You can find them at Aldi's, for example.)

Eat the ice cream therein. *We know, it's a mighty sacrifice that gardeners must make for their plants.*

2. Pull off the handle and cut out the bottom.

3. Cut off the ridge on top to end up with a flat band.

4. Bury the carton around the transplant. It should be a couple inches deep. I use two cartons with tomatoes, so I can lie them on their sides in the hole, which is normally how you plant them.

5. Enjoy your summer!



Some common cutworms



White grub adult and larva





Junior Master Gardeners have a busy month!



The JMGs of Pro Education Academy provided an educational booth at the Ellis County Lawn and Garden Expo in March.



Each member of the class spoke to the Ellis County Master Gardeners at their monthly meeting.



So You Need to Choose a Tree...

my experience

by Paul Thomas, ECMG

Suppose a windstorm hits and splits the trunk of your Bradford Pear. Or the electric company sends a team to carve your tree's canopy into an ugly Y-shape because the contractors who built the house put in a tree that's grown way too big and underneath a power line. Or you are pining away for a maple tree and fall color but understand that our alkaline clay soil is very suboptimal for a maple. You want to choose a new tree but aren't sure where to begin.

The place to start is Texas A&M Forest Service's website. They offer a simple tree selection guide. Here is the link. [Texas Tree Selector](#)

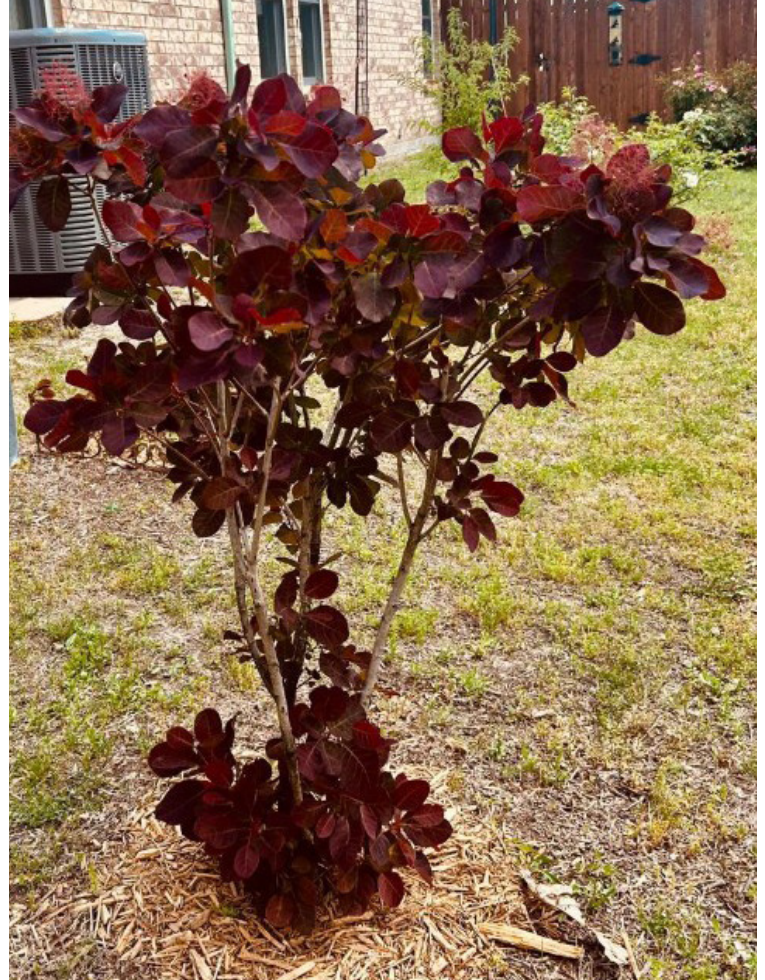
Most residences in Ellis County have front yards that will not accommodate a large or even a medium tree. That's because at maturity the tree will either want to grow a branch into one of your windows or its root zone, which will have a diameter that is double the height of a tree at maturity, will be impeded by the road, sidewalk, driveway or your house's foundation. And if your neighbor has a tree of the same species (that's common in homeowners' associations), the roots will intermingle and share any disease they have via the roots.

So, let's assume you want a small tree of 20 feet or less at maturity. After clicking on the link above, it gives you an express selector and a custom selector. Let's say you choose the former. Select Ellis in the dropdown menu, then "small" for the size. If you click "show trees," the results are four choices: Mexican plum, Mexican buckeye, rusty blackhaw, and desert willow.

These are all great trees, but let's say I want a wider range of choices. So go back and click the second link, the "custom tree selector." Select for a small area, a small tree, Ellis County, and fall color. This time, results yield 10 trees, including a couple from the previous list.

In my case, I selected an American smoke. I searched around and found our little darling in an online nursery with the size I wanted. I ordered and planted the tree. It is in its second year, and the photo is what it looks like as of April 16 in its second spring.

Using the Texas Tree Selector was not only easy, it turned a task that could have been overwhelming into a convenient, straightforward effort.





Cooking with Herbs: Chimichurri

by **Beth Norris ECMG**

With warmer temperatures ahead, many of us will be cranking up the outdoor grills to make use of these perfect conditions to fire grill/roast our favorite meats. One of my favorite and simpler sauces to make for grilled steak or chicken is chimichurri. This is a very versatile sauce and can be adjusted to taste with any of your favorite herbs/spices.

The word chimichurri is from Spain and was used to describe a table condiment for grilled meats. Usually used in the cooking from Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil cuisines, it is now widely used throughout most of Latin America.

The word itself may be a variant of the Spanish word chiriburri or hubbub. It may also have originated from the Basque term zurrumurru, which means noisy rumor. Another explanation or theory relates it to Basque tximitxurri or hodgepodge, meaning a mixture of several things. It's interesting to note that many Basques settled in Uruguay during the 19th century.

Some false etymologies try to explain the name as a mix up of English words, more commonly "Jimmy's curry" or "gimme curry," but there is no documentation to support these theories.

The most common and popular recipe is quite simple. It requires garlic, finely chopped fresh parsley, minced fresh red chile peppers, dried oregano, salt, vinegar and oil. Some recipes call for minced onion or shallots and lemon juice. But this is really a very versatile recipe, and you can use any variety of other fresh and dried herbs to make this your own. You can even use dried red chile flakes in place of fresh red chiles if you're in a pinch.

Chimichurri

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
- 3 to 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped or minced
- 2 small red chiles, deseeded and finely chopped or 1 large (about 1 tablespoon finely chopped)
- 3/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon coarse salt (or to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper or to taste



Mix all ingredients together in a small bowl. Allow to sit for 5 to 10 minutes to release all of the flavors into the oil before using. Ideally if time allows, let it sit for more than 2 hours.

Chimichurri can be prepared early and refrigerated for 24 hours if needed.

Use to baste meats while grilling or barbecuing. You can also use it as a marinade. Save some as a topping for your grilled meats.

Chimichurri will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator.

I hope you will give this recipe a try for your next grilled steak or other meat.