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ELLIS COUNTY

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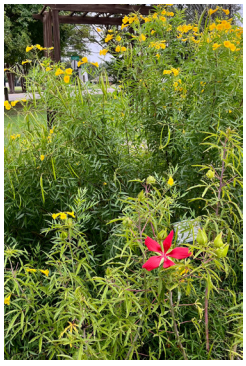
This newsletter is written by ECMG volunteers and is published bi-monthly in a digital format in January, March, May, July, September and November (odd months). For questions or submissions please email: ellisTXMGnews@gmail.com.

It's never to early to start learning in the Learning Garden.



https://www.facebook.com/ECMGA

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September & October 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. Runs through the end of the year.

Midlothian
Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Heritage Park, Historic Downtown by the Larkin Newton log cabin. Last day of the season November 15th.

Ennis
Bluebonnet Market
Saturdays, 8 a.m. to noon
100 N. Dallas St., Ennis
Master Gardener booth on the first Saturday of each month. Last day of the season October 31st.

September 6 & 7	Texas Discovery Gardens Plants Sale at Fair Park, Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Check their website for instructions and directions. https://txdg.org/plant-sale/
September 21	Farm Heritage Day, Sunday, 2-5 p.m. 140 Cunningham Meadows Rd., Waxahachie. Free admission. Outdoor games, hayrides, farm vendors, farm animals, farm history activities. http://RuralHeritageFarm.org
September 26-28	Hollydays Market of Waxahachie. Waxahachie Convention Center. 'First Call Shopping' Hours Friday 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. First Call admission -$10 General admission Hours Friday noon - 5 p.m. | Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. General admission - $6
October 25	Crossroads of Texas Country Festival. 9 a.m. - 7 p.m. Downtown Waxahachie. Ten entertainment stages, food booths and arts and crafts.

How to Plant Roses in Ellis County

David Austin Princess Anne

Across America, the rose is the favorite flower. When it comes to planting roses in Ellis County, the type of soil you choose is of the utmost importance. Nine distinct types of soil exist in Ellis County, ranging in texture from fine sand to stiff clay. Roses need the right kind soil to thrive, and Ellis County has a variety of soil types that can be used for this purpose.

Organic matter is important. The ideal soil for roses is a loamy soil with a good balance of sand, silt and clay. This type of soil can hold moisture without becoming waterlogged, and it has excellent drainage, which is essential for the health of rose roots. Additionally, loamy soil provides a good balance of nutrients that help roses grow and develop strong, healthy blooms.

Dig a hole large enough to accommodate the natural spread of the roots, usually 12 inches deep and 18 inches wide. The level of the plant should be planted at the same level as the rose was growing in the container. Do not cover the crown (the grafted area) with soil. Firm the soil around each plant and water thoroughly. This will eliminate any air pockets and settle the soil. Additionally, roses should be planted in an area that receives at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day. Finally, it is important to water your roses deeply and regularly during the first few weeks after planting to ensure they become established.

You will find the best selection of roses in nurseries and garden centers during January and February. Many of the newer varieties of roses available are more insect and disease resistant. Many of the "old roses" (also called antique or "found" roses) are also more available. These are the famous roses you might have heard about that have been growing in cemeteries and old homesteads, totally uncared for, yet thriving for years. Gardeners can choose between bare-root plants or container plants.

Bare-root plants should be planted as soon as time allows after purchase. If there is a delay of more than a few days, the shipping bag should be removed and the rose "heeled in" by covering the roots and part of the tops with loose soil or peat moss. The bare-root plant should be kept moist during the "heeling in" process.

Container-grown roses can be planted at any time, except during the hot summer months. Container-grown grosses typically would experience less planting shock than a bare-root plant. One-gallon containers are usually too small for a normal-sized, 2-year-old plant. A 2- or 3-gallon size is better and will have a healthier root system.

Each rose will have a label that explains the proper spacing. Overcrowding of plants will result in less airflow around each plant and increase disease problems.

Following these steps will ensure your roses have the best chance of thriving in the Ellis County area.

Picking Heritage Fruit Trees and Vines for Beauty and Food

Part Two

by Rob Franks, ECMG

Native Fruit Trees

In the previous article, I described seven fruit-bearing plants that were popular in the gardens of our ancestors and you may not have heard about them, including the Nanking cherry tree and the Loquat tree. There are many more that are still used in modern gardens like the five below.

Sand Plum or Chickasaw Plum Tree

The 20-foot tree is covered in white flowers in the spring often before the leaves come out.

The 1-inch fruit ripens to red in midsummer. The fruit is not large but like most wild plants it has a relatively large seed. The plum's seed contains amygdalin like a peach pit, which can break down into hydrocyanic acid, which is poisonous; however once the seed is removed the tasty pulp is widely used for jellies.

The tree also serves as a host plant to a number of butterfly varieties.

Elderberry Tree

The Elderberry tree is a long time southern favorite and can grow up to 12 feet tall. Elderberries are edible; however, they must be cooked because elderberries, including their seeds, contain cyanogenic glycosides, which can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Cooking eliminates these toxins, which makes the berries safe to eat as jelly or jam. The berries can also be fermented and made into a wine. The berries are tart, so cooking them with sugar is recommended.

When the berries are ripe they turn dark purple and birds like them, so you have to be vigilant. They do produce a lot of berries, so there is usually enough berries for all.

Like most fruit trees, they will drop their fruit when it ripens and can make a bit of a mess, so the tree might not be suited for a front yard.

Crabapple Tree

There are several types of Crabapple trees, but the Blanco Crabapple is a Texas native, which means it has evolved to the Texas climate and is adapted; however, it will not grow everywhere in Texas. It is a small tree (12 to 15 feet) with a slow growth rate, but it stands up to drought, has moderate water requirements and is a slow grower. It prefers partial shade and alkaline soils

where the soil is rockier, such as the Edwards Plateau, but it can survive the Texas summer and our brutal winters. It is a small tree that is showy in both spring and in fall. There are many cultivars available that may do better in your area.

The fruit is small but plentiful and is food for birds and other wildlife. The fruit can be messy if not picked.

Mulberry Tree

The Mulberry tree's fruit is sweet and excellent for eating. Often it is underrated because it has aggressive roots and they should be planted away from underground water lines like an irrigation system and your home's foundation. It is loved and hated but throughout the years you should always be able to gather a lot of fruit. They can get big, which means that it can be hard to pick all of the fruit, but the birds love them. They can make a big mess and the fruit will sprout and produce a lot of seedlings. The dwarf variety is a lot easier to work with, and I recommend planting them on the back of your property.

Persimmon Tree

While persimmon trees are a subtropical tree they can grow in zones 7 to 10. Some are native to southeastern America. I suggest that you look for American persimmon trees as they tolerate a wider range of climate rather than the Japanese varieties. They like full sun and well-drained soil that is slightly acidic. Once planted it can reach 15 feet tall and begin bearing fruit at 3 to 5 years.

As you might have heard, you do not want to eat a non-ripe persimmon because they are very astringent and you will pucker! Once ripe, however, they are very sweet and good to eat.

Next time

I will be writing about the Medlar tree, Juneberry tree, Quince tree, and Pawpaw tree. I hope that one of these descriptions might give you an interest in planting a native fruit tree.

Here's Rob's first article (published in July) on this subject:

https://txmg.org/ellis/picking-heritage-fruit-trees-and-vines-for-beauty-and-food/

Talking to Plants: What Does Science Have To Say About This?

Have you ever heard anyone say they talk to their plants? Have you ever wondered if there was any benefit to this practice? Well, I have for both questions. After I purchased a lovely Japanese Maple, I was told by the seller to be sure to talk to it after I planted it in the ground. This got me thinking about the benefits to this advice. So, I started an online research mission to answer the question: Is talking to our plants worth it?

I found several articles online based on scientific research and was impressed with the results. I found articles from Penn State University that cited studies from the Royal Horticultural Society and one study that dates back to 1846. Studies on this topic have been conducted by the National Institute of Agricultural Biotechnology in South Korea, Charles Darwin and MythBusters, the popular TV show. In a nutshell, most of the articles agree that sound creates vibrations that can be felt by plants. These vibrations aid in the act of photosynthesis, which we all know is vital to cell growth and survival of all plant forms.

Some studies also concluded that music as well as speech directed at plants was beneficial. The decibel of sound did make a difference as well as the type of music. Loud heavy metal music stressed plants, while calmer music such as jazz and classical music promoted positive plant development and growth.

While there is still much to research and learn about the impact of human voice on our plants, I believe it warrants our efforts to spend the time talking to the plants in our gardens. Even if it only promotes more contact and awareness of our plants and their surrounding environment, how could that be a bad thing? Not to mention the effects this action has on our own sense of wellbeing. Spending additional time in our gardens increases our exposure to light, beauty of nature and the sense of accomplishment.

If you're still not totally convinced that talking to your plants is worth your time, go online and read up on the studies that have been done and are being done on this topic. You can click on the links below to find some studies cited in those articles for further information. Get outside and do your own experiment by talking to your plants and see if you find any conclusive evidence. If nothing else, you'll spend time outside in the sunshine enjoying nature.

References:

[Talking to Plants Can Help Them Grow Faster]

[The Surprising Benefits Of Talking To Plants - Green Packs]

[The Science Behind Talking to Plants for Better Growth]

Emma Siar & Juliana Bueno

Since 2003, the Ellis County Master Gardener Association has provided opportunities to students who chose college studies in horticulture and/or life sciences disciplines. We have currently awarded 48 graduating high school students with college scholarships totaling $120,100! The funds for these scholarships comes from the sponsorships collected each year from our Garden Expo.

Emma Siar:
Emma is the recipient of the Jim Dockins Scholarship in the amount of $3,000. Emma is in her second year at Tarleton State University where she is studying horticulture. She is a member of Tarleton's Texan Stars dance team and will serve as a resident assistant in the fall. Emma graduated from Midlothian Heritage High School in the spring of 2024.

Juliana Bueno:
Juliana is the recipient of the Monty Gearner Scholarship in the amount of $3,000. Juliana graduated salutatorian from Life High School Waxahachie this spring along with an associate's degree from Navarro College. In addition to these accomplishments, Juliana has completed a pharmacy technician license. She will attend Texas State University in the fall, studying wildlife biology.

Biochar

By Paul Thomas, ECMG

You may have seen a sack of something called biochar in the soil amendments section of a big box hardware store. You may have also used it in your barbecue as charcoal briquets. Yes, that's the same stuff.

Biochar is made through a process of oxygen-deprived burning called pyrolysis. If you have ever toured in rural Africa, you may have seen burnable materials stacked and covered with mud, casting off smoke. Those people are making biochar to sell in the market for cooking. Indeed, you probably also saw street vendors roasting maize or pork over charcoal.

A Dutch scientist in the 1960s was exploring the Amazon. And he noted that indigenous people incorporated black stuff in their gardens and that such areas were more fertile than areas without the black stuff. What was it? Biochar!

I wanted to start a new 4-foot x 4-foot garden. I wasn't going to try to make anything of black clay, so I laid down cardboard and built it up with purchased soil and other amendments. It had been my practice to incorporate expanded shale for water retention. However, that substance had become popular, expensive and hard to find. So when I saw biochar at the big box, I asked around and did some research. I decided to buy a sack. I combined it with five sacks of soil and other amendments to bring the garden to the desired volume and fertility. That gave me pretty good results, among them that I seldom need to water.

I also had some dumb luck. Biochar is high
minimum you need to know the chemical
used in the manufacturing process. Biocha
in manufacturing it. It can even be hydrop
of retaining it. That's the exact opposite of

Texas A&M Agrilife recommends starting
gallon of mix. (You will note that I mixed a

In the year since I bought it, it has become
cents an ounce for the pure stuff. In some
minerals and fertilizer have been added.

In other cases, it may be one component of a bag of top soil, and therefore much cheaper.

What are the pros of using biochar?

- Biochar can substitute for peat moss, which is a mined and a limited resource. Biochar can also be used in place of perlite.
- Biochar sequesters carbon. It does not decompose in the soil. (This is a somewhat debatable point. The manufacturing process does add carbon to the atmosphere, and most charcoal is burned, at least in my African experience.)
- Biochar holds onto moisture and prevents the leaching of nutrients from the soil.

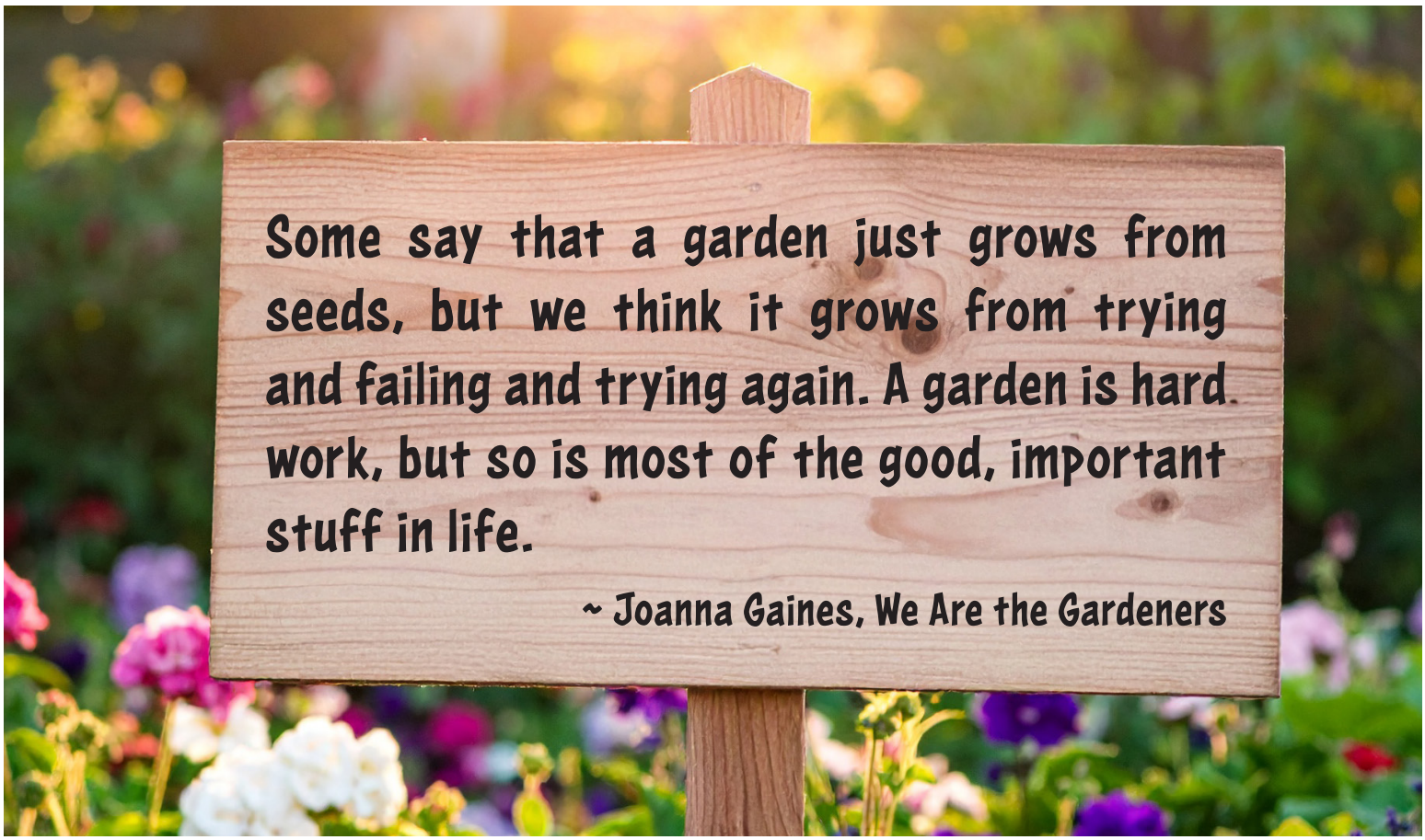
- Biochar limits acidity. That can be beneficial if you are not building your garden bed using the local clay as a base.

Biochar can be used:
- To clean the runoff of manure from dairy farms to streams.
- To capture heavy metals and other pollutants.

Activated charcoal is made from a different process than biochar. It is much more alkaline, and it is much more porous. During activation, it is treated with steam, acids, or other chemicals and is done at higher temperatures. However, people are exploring the cheaper biochar as a substitute for activated charcoal, for example, in the cleaning of toxins from the soil.

References:

- Biochar for Soil Improvement
- Biochar cleans water runoff from dairy manure fertilizer- AgriLife Today
- What Is Biochar and How Is It Used? | USU



Storing the Harvest

Harvesting vegetables from the garden is one of the rewards of planting, but it's not the ultimate incentive. Eating is the pinnacle. It can be frustrating when those delicious rewards are lost after the harvest. If improperly stored, produce can deteriorate prematurely, suffering damage. To retain the best quality, knowledge is key.

As most gardeners know, vegetables continue the life process even after they are harvested. So, it's important to know the ripeness. Ripeness determines storage. If the vegetable is still immature, it needs to be stored at room temperature, so it can continue maturing. However, if it is ripe, the process needs to be slowed by chilling it.

Also, air circulation is necessary to minimize spoilage as well as proper moisture level (or humidity). Some vegetables require high humidity during storage, while others, such as onions, do not. To help sort out the different needs, here is a handy post-harvest storage guide for specific garden vegetables.

Here's a quick guide for storing your harvest bounty.

Asparagus – Store in the refrigerator and wash before cooking.

Beans (broad, lima and green shell) – Store in a cool and humid place and use quickly.

Beans (snap) – Store in cold (45 to 50 F degrees) and humid place and use quickly. Wash before storing.

Beets – Wash and refrigerate immediately.

Broccoli – Store in the refrigerator's cold section.

Brussels sprouts – Store in the refrigerator's cold section.

Cabbage – Store in the refrigerator's crisp drawer and use within 7 to 14 days.

Carrots – Refrigerator after harvesting and washing.

Cauliflower – Store in a cool, humid place.

Celery – Store in the refrigerator after harvesting and washing.

Corn (sweet) – Immediately after harvesting, refrigerate, cook or eat.

Cucumber – Store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. Refrigerating for longer periods might damage cucumbers.

Eggplant – Store in a cool, humid place.

Garlic – Store in a cool, dry place.

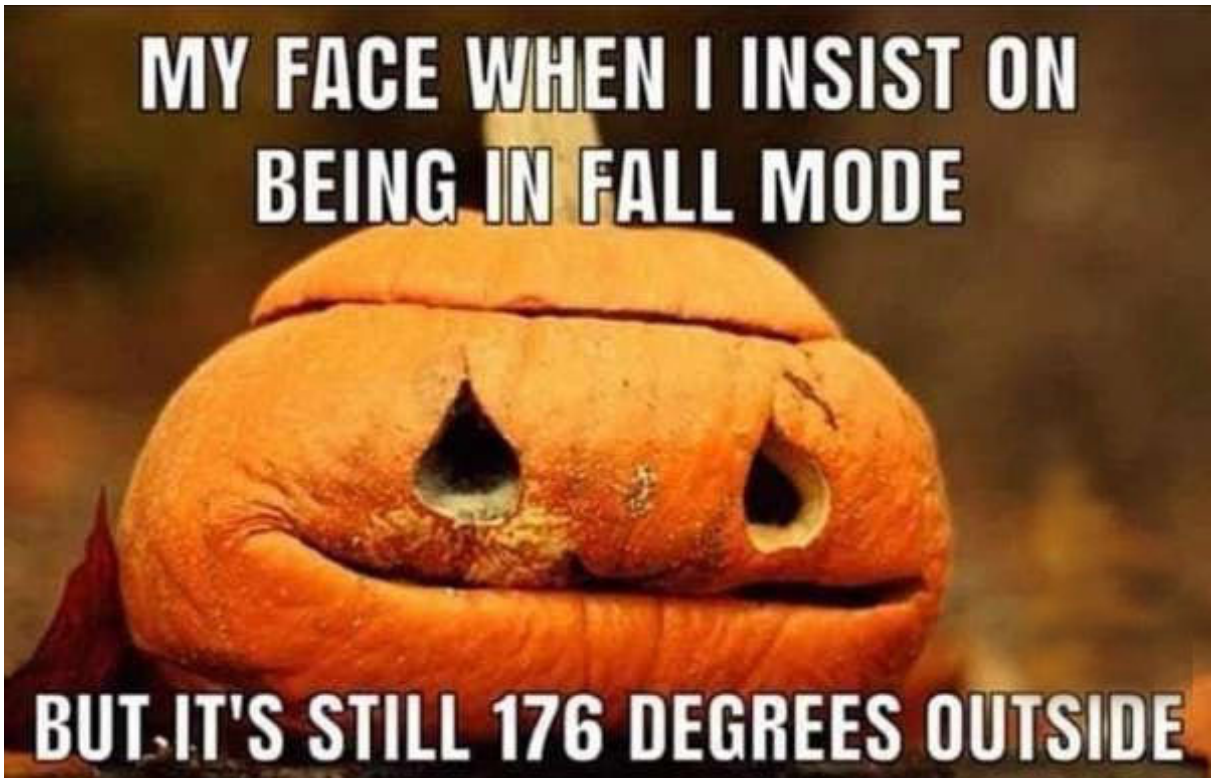
Greens – Refrigerate immediately after harvesting and washing.

Kohlrabi – Refrigerate after harvesting.

Lettuce – Store in the refrigerator after harvesting and washing.

Melon (muskmelon) – If ripe, refrigerate. If immature, store in a cool place.
Okra – Chill immediately after harvest.
Onion – Store in a cool, dry place.
Parsley – Refrigerate after harvest.
Peas – Immediately refrigerate after harvesting and washing.
Potato (new)– Do not wash but remove clinging dirt. Store in a cool, dry place.
Pumpkin – Store in a cool, dry place.
Radish – Wash and chill immediately.
Rutabaga – Refrigerate after harvesting.
Spinach – Store in the refrigerator after harvesting and washing.
Squash – Do not store in cold temperatures for more than 2 to 3 days.
Sweet potato – Do not wash but remove any clinging dirt. Cure for a minimum of 14 days after harvest in a well-ventilated, warm place. Store in a cool, dry place.
Tomato – Refrigerate after harvesting.
Turnips – Store in a cold, humid location.

Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Easy Gardening.
https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/09/EHT-071.pdf



Sweet Heat

Peach Jalapeño Jam

Prep Time: 30 min
Total Time: 1 hr 30 min
Yield: 12 8-ounce jars of jam

- 6 pounds fresh peaches (about 15)
- 6 fresh jalapeños
- 6 cups sugar
- Juice (only) from 1 large lemon
- 1 package pectin
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 12 8-ounce canning jars and lids

Wash fruit and jalapeños well. Puree peaches in a food processor until slightly chunky. Some chunks are good. You don't want it completely smooth.

Process the jalapeños separately until they are very finely diced.

Add peach puree and jalapeños to a large pot. Bring to a simmer, stirring regularly.

Stir in sugar, lemon juice, and pectin. Continue to stir until everything is dissolved.

Continue to let the jam simmer for another 15 minutes to thicken. Add a small amount of butter, which will help prevent foaming. If any foam does come up though, try to scrape it off the jam.

Boil your jars and lids for 10 minutes to sterilize them. Once they are sterilized, use a funnel and ladle to fill each jar, leaving about 1/4 inch of room at the top of each jar.

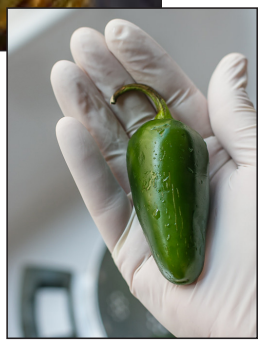
Wipe each jar clean and place a clean lid on it. Then screw on the band that holds the lid in place. Be careful. The jar will be very hot!

Place all the jars in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes to process them. Make sure the simmering water covers the jars by at least an inch.

Remove the jars and let them cool completely for 24 hours. At that point if there are any jars that aren't sealed well, then put on a new lid and band and re-process the jar in boiling water. Test the seal: if you can press down the center of the lid and it pops up, it is not sealed well.

Store sealed jars in a cool dark place for up to a year.

Sweet Heat, continued



Sweet and Hot Jalapeños
(a.k.a. Cowboy Candy)

3 pounds jalapeños
(about 24-30), medium-sized
2 cups apple cider vinegar
6 cups granulated white sugar
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
1/2 teaspoon celery seed
3 teaspoons granulated garlic
1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

Wearing gloves, remove and discard stems from jalapeños.

Slice jalapeños into uniform 1/4-inch rounds.

In a large pot, bring cider vinegar, sugar, turmeric, celery seed, garlic, cayenne and black pepper to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 5-6 minutes, stirring to dissolve the granulated ingredients. Increase the heat to boiling, add jalapeños (seeds and all) and bring the mixture to a boil. Simmer for 5 minutes.

Transfer jalapeños into 5 or 6 clean 1/2 pint jars, filling to within 1/4 inch of the rim. Heat the remaining liquid to a rolling boil for 6-7 minutes. Spoon liquid into the jars. Wipe the rim clean.

Seal jars and place them in a water bath, making sure to cover the lids by 1 inch and boiling for 10-12 minutes.

Remove jars from the water bath to cool. Allow the jars to cure for 2 weeks before serving.

Uses: goes great with cream cheese and crackers, nachos, tacos or sandwiches to add a spicy kick.

Let an Ellis County Master Gardener give you a helping hand by answering your gardening questions. We're an email away at EllisTxMGnews@gmail.com

J.H. asks:
I recently bought a Peggy Martin rose bush, but I'm worried about planting it now (in the hottest time of the year). Should I wait until the fall for planting?

Marj McClung, ECMG replies:
Yes, you are correct to wait for planting. Your rose would be stressed if planted now, even with regular water. Roses need to be planted in late fall to winter when they can grow strong root systems. Plant it by February, so they will be well established before the hot temperatures hit.

Peggy Martin is a spring bloomer, but it repeats sometimes, especially in weather like this year with lots of rain and cooler temperatures. For now, keep your potted rose in a place where it gets part sun and keep it watered. Don't fertilize in the summer when the heat will fry new growth. When you do plant it, full sun is ideal. I put a little compost in my black clay soil to get the plant off to a good start.