

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 here!



It's been 20 Fabulous Years of Ellis County Master Gardeners Calendars

The anniversary edition of the ECMG calendar is now available, marking a 20th year milestone. It's chalk full of monthly gardening checklists, timely advice, moon phases, holidays, community happenings, and rainfall statistics. You can pick up your copy at sponsoring businesses or at events where the Master Gardeners are present, such as farmers markets in Waxahachie, Midlothian, and Ennis or the Ellis County Master Gardeners Expo.

[Read more... pg 3](#)

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JANUARY & FEBRUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Ellis County Farmers' Markets

Waxahachie

CLOSED for maintenance
the month of January.
Reopening February 7th
Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
701 Howard Road

Midlothian

Closed
for the
season.

Ennis

Closed
for the
season.

**Saturday
January 10**

Texas Discovery Gardens Plant Sale - House Plants 9
9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
3601 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Dallas

**Saturday
January 17**

CCMG Edible Gardening 101 - 9 a.m. - noon
Myer's Park Event Center
7117 County Road 166
McKinney, Texas 75071

Ticket Price: \$15

<https://www.simpletix.com/e/edible-gardening-101-tickets-249994>

**“Anyone who thinks that gardening begins in
the Spring and ends in the Fall is missing the best
part of the whole year; for gardening begins in
January with the dream.”**

~Josephine Nuese

**Saturday
February 14**

11 a.m. -11 p.m. - Hachie Gras 2026
Biggest Little Mardi Gras Celebration

**Saturday
February 21**

Mayor's Annual Winter Walk
10 a.m. to noon
Mockingbird Nature Park
1361 Onward Road, Midlothian

What to do in January.... from our 2026 Calendar



PLANTING

- January and February are the best months to transplant anything that you would like to be in a different spot in your landscape. Plants are the most dormant and will be less shocked when their roots are cut.
- Container-grown trees, shrubs and vines can be planted now.
- If you haven't, get your vegetable garden ready. Raised beds (12" more or less) of the best-composted soil you can find and afford will pay off in a much bigger and healthy harvest. Start transplants (seeds) of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, etc. (6-8 weeks from your planting date). Set out onion, cilantro, garlic and parsley transplants. Mulch bare areas of the garden to prevent weed growth.
- Plant blackberries, fruit and nut trees. They should be available in January, February and March at local nurseries. See <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut> for recommended varieties.

FERTILIZING & PRUNING

- Do not trim your spring-blooming perennials or shrubs. Do not cut the tops off crape myrtles despite what anyone tells you. Peach and Plum trees however should be pruned from the center out in a "bowl" shape. This results in greater fruit production.
- Fertilize established cool-season vegetables to maintain vigor. Nitrogen is especially important, but don't apply too much at one time.
- Winter is the pruning and planting season for trees, shrubs and woody vines. Because of dormancy, these are the best two months for major pruning and trimming of most everything, especially ornamental grasses. Trim them completely to the ground.
- Woody ornamental trees, vines and shrubs that only bloom in the spring should not be pruned until after they bloom to avoid removing bloom buds.

GARDEN WATCH

- With our recent history of below-average temperatures in north Texas, be prepared with a row cover or frost cloth of some kind (not plastic) to put over your vegetable garden or recently planted perennials, shrubs, etc. Make sure you water your plants, grass (especially St. Augustine), etc. if a hard, long freeze is imminent. Wet roots are insulated roots, and this will add a layer of protection from abnormally cold weather.
- Continue to remove leaves from your lawn. Red Oaks and Monterey Oaks usually are the last to lose their leaves this time of year.
- We have some GREAT local feed stores and nurseries, who are also sponsors of this calendar, where you can find local seeds and transplants for our county.

HISTORY OF THE ELLIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS CALENDAR.... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

For the past 2 decades, the Ellis County Master Gardeners have published a calendar packed with valuable guidance for local gardeners. Each year, about 5,000 copies are printed and distributed to gardeners throughout Ellis County -- that's almost 100,000 calendars since its inception.

The idea for the calendar came from Pam Daniel during her first year as a Master Gardener. She saw the need for resources to advance the mission of providing horticultural education in the community and believed a printed calendar was an ideal solution. Thanks to Pam's initiative, a committee was formed to create the calendar, which involved various duties such as finding sponsors, collecting details on local events, and researching and writing articles. The calendar's success is evident both in its popularity among Ellis County residents and in its receipt of two state-wide awards for educational content. Pam has remained on the committee since its beginning. Other long-serving committee members include Linda Ballard (since 2011), Sheila Cloonen (since 2015), and Scotty Rigsby (since 2017).

The continued success of the calendar of more than 20 years is thanks to our generous sponsors. Their support allows us to offer calendars at no cost to local gardeners. Several businesses have supported the calendar every single year: The Greenery, Travis Equip. Co., Tex-Scapes, Boyce Feed & Grain, and Pam Daniel, REALTOR®. When you visit these sponsors, please thank them for their ongoing commitment!

By Donna Sumerlin, ECMG



Exploring El Niño and La Niña and Their Impact on Our Summer Garden

by Teresa Brown,ECMG

Most, if not all, of us have heard the meteorologists talk about the “little boy” or “little girl.” In terms of weather, they are more recognizable as El Niño and La Niña. These weather patterns have become a part of our weekly forecast, but some of us may have missed the memo explaining what they are and why we hear about them every year.

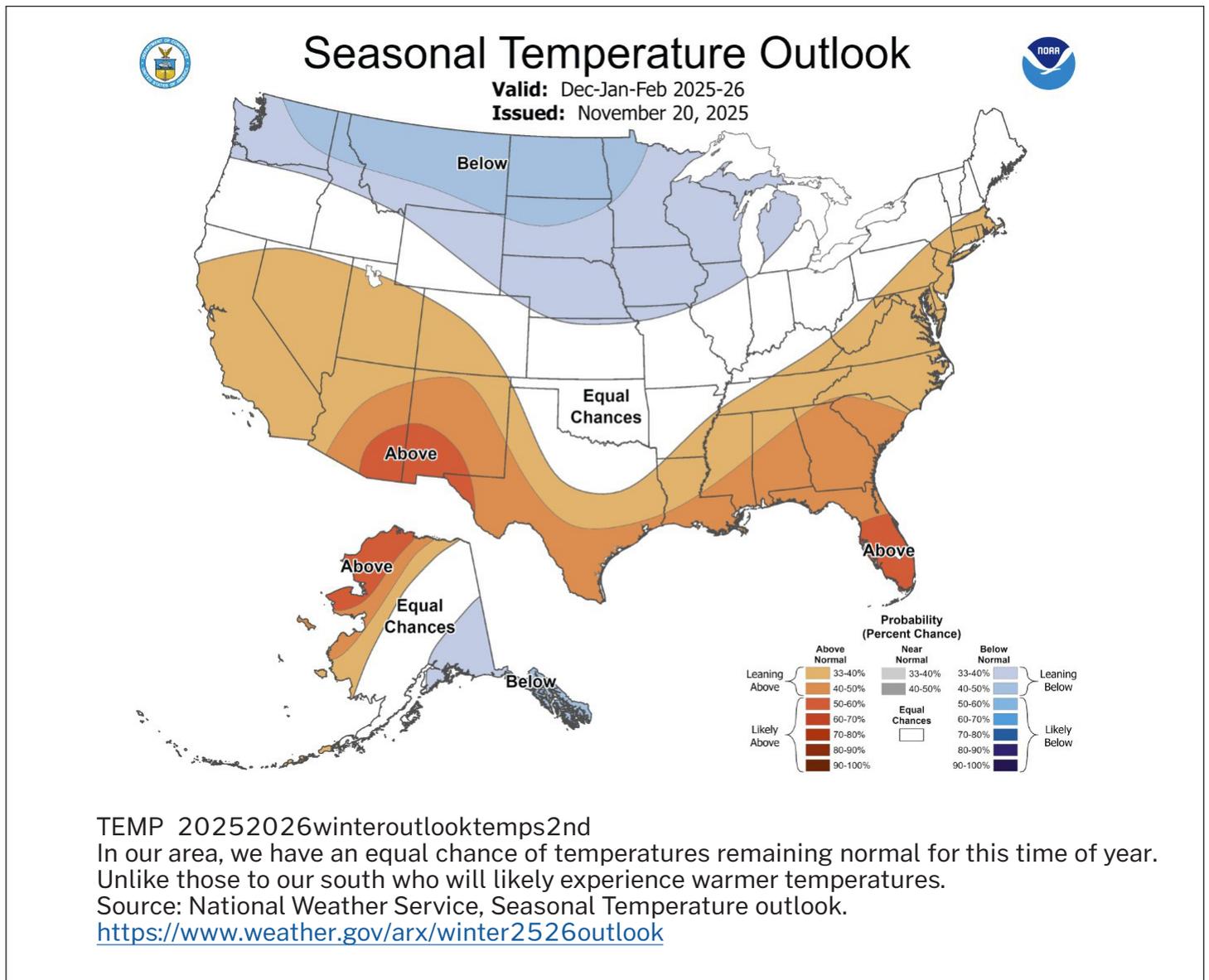
At the simplest description, they are naturally occurring climate patterns that have global impact. Typically, in the Pacific Ocean along the equatorial belt, there is a constant, reliable east-to-west wind. It's called a trade wind. Sailors used the steady trade winds to help propel them westward across the ocean. For history buffs, the name “trade” comes from Middle English or Middle Low German referencing a route or passageway. It's akin to the Old English word tredan (meaning to tread) and the Old High German trata (meaning track). Trade winds typically blow warm water from South America to Asia. However, El Niño and La Niña interrupt that pattern.

Together, El Niño and La Niña are weather developments known as El Niño-Southern Oscillation, or ENSO (pronounced en-so), cycle. They typically (but not always) will occur every two to seven years. El Niño lasts about 9 to 12 months while La Niña can last 2 years or more. Generally, they develop in the spring months and peak sometime between November and February. From March through June, they tend to be weak. And usually, El Niño occurs more than its counterpart, La Niña.

When El Niño occurs, the trade winds falter and weaken. The weaker winds may not push as much warm water toward Asia, or it may completely be reversed, and the warm waters move eastward toward the west coast of North and South America. The warm waters, in turn, affect the jet stream, shifting it more southernly. This change causes Canada and the northern U.S. states to be warmer and drier than what is normally expected. However, along the Gulf Coast and southeastern U.S. states, the weather will be wetter and flooding can occur.

La Niña is the opposite of its weather “sibling.” The trade winds become stronger, pushing more warm water eastward toward Asia. Cold water from the ocean depths rise and push the jet stream in a northern direction, which creates drought in the southern parts of the United States and rains with flooding in the northern areas. During a La Niña cycle, winter temperatures will be warmer in the south and cooler in the north. It can also enhance hurricane development.

This year, the National Weather Service has predicted a La Niña cycle, peaking in December. They are predicting warmer than average temperatures with lower precipitation in North and Central Texas. Warmer temperatures in the winter can be a welcome experience, but lower precipitation is not good news. It could mean we have drier summer ahead, which means more watering. Or maybe we plan differently and opt for different strategies, such as drought-tolerant plants. Whatever we do, understanding how the “little boy” or “little girl” weather patterns affect us is more knowledge in our pocket to help us succeed in our gardening efforts.



Sources:

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (n.d.) Trade. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trade>
- National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (Jan. 18, 2016.) El Niño and La Niña: Frequently asked questions. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/el-nino-and-la-nina-frequently-asked-questions>
- National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (n.d.) What are El Niño and La Niña? <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ninonina.html>
- National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (n.d.) What are trade winds? <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/tradewinds.html>
- National Weather Service. (Oct. 9, 2025.) El Niño/La Niña Information. <https://www.weather.gov/fwd/enso>

Plant Buying for



As the March 28th 2026 EXPO is approaching, we thought we would take a quick peek at the Ellis County Master Gardener plant committee to see what they do behind the scenes to help make the plant sale happen.

First, the plant committee reviews last year's EXPO to discuss what plants sold well and which ones were not as popular. Typically, the EXPO plant sale includes perennials, herbs, assorted vegetables, shade loving and annual plants. With an assortment this large, plus whatever plants might be newer or unusual, it requires good communications with our vendors.

Additionally, we have a budget that is approved by our board members, otherwise it would be easy to just go on a spending spree with all those beautiful plants and the spring weather calling us to go into the garden.

Next comes the allocation of which plants to buy versus which plants are available and at what price. Weather plays a big role in what is available for purchase, and most vendors have to decide which plants to grow by October (or sooner). So, sometimes plant selection can be limited due to extreme weather conditions regardless of how much we originally wanted to buy it.



Next comes the experience of having been there/done that. Having team members who have previous experience with working the EXPO plant sale helps ensure that we have a plan in place for a successful sale.

The day prior to the EXPO is a busy day of setting up protective floor coverings, lining out the tables and organizing the plants as they arrive (hopefully, not at the same time). This usually involves moving something down, at least once, so as to have room, leave room, and make room for the next load of plants that will be arriving soon from the next vendor. Finally, the morning of EXPO is here and our customers usually line up early before the doors open to make a dash for the must-have plants for their garden. Don't worry if you are not the first in line, the plant committee has done their job to make sure that there is both quantity and quality.

We look forward to seeing you at the 2026 EXPO and helping you find the plants that fit your gardening needs.

By Malcolm Avaritt, ECMG



JUNIOR MASTER GARDENERS @ CLIFT ELEMENTARY

by Agnes Douglas, ECMG



In September, I was contacted by our president of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association (ECMGA), Susan Knapp, about a request received by LaSheka Day, 4H Extension Agent for Prairie View A&M at Ellis County. It was a request from Kristy Weir, a teacher at Clift Elementary in Waxahachie seeking assistance and direction to revive the existing gardens at the school, which have been dormant for about a year.

Oliver E. Clift is a K-5 grade school located at 650 Parks School House Road in Waxahachie; it was previously a middle school. The school has approximately 500 students and about 50 faculty/staff members. The school's garden was created around 2011 or 2012 and is located at the back of the building. There is also a chicken coop in the main garden and a registered Monarch butterfly way station on one side of the building.

After touring the gardens, it was obvious that lots of hard work, planning, and dedication have gone into the creation and maintenance of these gardens. There are currently 6 long beds (16 feet) split in half. I took a few photos, measurements, offered a few suggestions and recommendations, and shared the Jr. Master Gardener (JMG) program/curriculum with Ms. Weir.

Ms. Weir along with fellow teacher Jessica Phillips are committed to reviving the garden and wanted to start an after-school garden club with third- through fifth-grade students. The Clift Garden Club held its first meeting on October 2 with approximately 25 students. The club meets every Thursday from 4-5 p.m. The JMG program being used is the Learn, Grow, Eat & Go, which is a research and evidence-based curriculum that combines academic achievement, gardening, nutrient-dense food experiences, physical activity, and school and family engagement.

With the garden being dormant for a while, the first task was to clean up the garden, so we planned a Clean-up Day for October 16, 2025. The students made posters and put them all over the school. We had parents, students, and teachers chopping, pulling, and trimming weeds. Because the ground was so dry, we were not able to get all the weeds, but we made a huge difference. We will have more clean-up days ahead before we're ready to plant anything. Thanks to everyone who participated. We will always need volunteers.

Anita Barnes, ECMGA Master Gardener, taught and worked at Clift for about 9 years, and started the first Garden Club as part of a Positive Behavior Initiative, which the school did every 6 weeks. She also stated that there were many who were instrumental and worked tirelessly by contributing their time, expertise, and knowledge to get the garden started.





A few of those include:

- Mr. Brewster, former principal
- Donna Richey
- Christi Kubin, former principal
- Arlene Hamilton, MG Emeritis
- John Paul Deenin
- Portia Wood
- Burt Plunkett
- Waxahachie ISD Education Foundation (funded several grants)
- LaSheka Day, 4H Extension Agent for Prairie View A&M at Ellis County

School gardening can make lasting differences in the lives of children. Research shows that school gardens nurture healthy kids, foster environmental stewardship, promote engaged learning and empower children to make change. Gardening also fosters critical thinking, observation, engagement, and reasoning skills in children, while teaching them the value of responsibility and reliability.

There have also been many students, parents, teachers, and community members who have contributed their time, donated supplies, etc to this project. The ECMGA is excited about taking on this partnership with Clift Elementary and look forward to working with the Clift community.

If you would like to contribute, volunteer, or get involved with the garden, please contact the school at (972) 923-472.

Holiday ECMG Word Find!

Find these words from ECMG's November newsletter for a holiday win!

V	B	M	H	M	S	W	E	A	E	E	C	B	Y	I	N	K	B	I	Y
E	N	B	R	N	B	C	N	B	X	O	I	B	E	R	H	U	G	A	K
O	Z	Q	P	Z	N	J	N	L	K	O	I	I	G	O	A	X	R	Q	I
N	P	O	G	E	J	E	Q	R	C	Z	N	S	I	I	B	K	D	B	Y
H	G	E	D	A	E	S	D	H	E	L	J	N	O	E	O	O	B	K	J
G	G	I	D	Y	L	O	A	T	A	G	Y	G	P	G	F	H	J	W	T
E	V	W	N	J	N	R	F	O	E	V	A	B	X	W	S	L	A	K	U
E	B	I	V	O	M	K	C	I	Q	E	L	T	E	P	Y	R	L	S	K
S	L	J	R	N	L	R	I	C	M	U	S	Y	I	A	J	A	A	E	X
P	A	U	S	D	A	E	T	S	E	M	O	H	U	R	J	B	P	F	W
H	I	B	Q	H	F	P	M	B	U	B	S	T	B	J	E	I	E	I	K
M	N	B	C	F	W	D	O	E	Y	R	F	I	H	S	F	H	N	P	Q
I	N	R	C	P	E	N	X	U	A	J	C	A	P	P	C	T	O	Y	O
S	E	L	I	O	N	M	M	L	L	T	R	A	S	I	E	O	V	U	I
T	R	F	T	E	Z	Z	O	T	Z	V	A	R	M	R	T	I	I	Z	Q
L	E	A	T	D	T	H	W	R	E	N	Z	L	I	W	A	P	W	A	P
E	P	Y	I	G	C	J	E	S	V	B	W	Z	K	A	Q	L	N	T	M
T	X	F	V	S	K	E	T	Z	K	Y	I	A	L	I	U	Y	H	S	B
O	W	A	S	A	K	C	I	H	C	N	R	Y	J	Z	N	W	H	L	G
E	S	L	I	G	G	M	W	Z	G	L	T	F	X	N	P	G	A	R	V

Answer to puzzle

on pg. 12

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| HERITAGE | MISTLETOE |
| BLUEBONNET | PERENNIAL |
| CHICKASAW | PAWPAW |
| BIOCHAR | HOMESTEADS |
| CHARCOAL | HARVEST |
| KOHLRABI | OKRA |
| TALKING | EVIDENCE |
| ROSE | |
| WINTERIZING | |
| JALAPENO | |
| SCHOLARSHIPS | |
| MELON | |
| EXPO | |



Cooking from my garden ...a gardener's recipes

Fried Green Tomatoes

By Paul Thomas, ECMG

So, with the forecast low at 29 degrees (F) tonight, I decided that it's time for the final tomato harvest. I won't pull the vine yet, because I'm curious to see if the vine can survive (or if the forecast is inaccurate).

Here's the one celebrity tomato plant that survived the summer with my benign neglect. I hardly ever watered it.

The harvest included one purple bell pepper.

The recipe we use is inspired by Allrecipe's Perfect Fried Green Tomatoes.

Fried Green Tomatoes

- 4 green tomatoes
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 cup cornmeal

Cajun seasoning

- 2-1/2 teaspoons paprika
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1-1/4 teaspoon oregano
- 1-1/4 teaspoon thyme
- 2 teaspoons ground cayenne pepper
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- Oil (for frying)

Preheat oil, 2 to 3 inches deep, to 350 degrees (F) in a deep fryer or deep frying pan.

Slice the tomatoes into quarter-inch slices; set them aside.

Make a batter with the flour, buttermilk and cornmeal by mixing them together.

Mix the cajun seasoning together and add to the batter.

Dip the slices into the batter and immediately slide them into the hot oil.

Fry the tomato slices, turning as needed, until they are golden brown, crispy and float on the oil, about 2 to 3 minutes.



Remove and drain on paper towels.

Dip the slices in Ranch dressing mixed with the Cajun seasoning.

And pair the tomatoes with the movie "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Cafe." The Whistle Stop Cafe is a real place. The movie is hilarious, of the kind that you get more out of with multiple viewings.

Finally, about those celebration tomatoes. They seemed to stop producing the minute the mercury hit 90. No amount of water or fertilizer helped. In prior seasons, I used the variety 4th of July and it did well. It thrives in hot weather, thus the name. I may go that way this year, even though I'll have to start them myself.

Amazon Video: [Fried Green Tomatoes/Fried Green Tomatoes At The Whistle Stop Cafe 1991 Comedy/Drama FullMovie Facts](#)

Apple TV: [Fried Green Tomatoes - Apple TV](#)



**Do you know a
graduating high
school senior
who is planning
on studying
agriculture here
in Texas?**



Ellis County Master Gardener Scholarships

It's that time of the year for current and college-bound students to apply for the Monty Gerner Memorial Scholarship, and this year, qualifying students may be eligible for up to \$6,000. All applications must be in the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office by 4:00 p.m., March 13, 2026. Additional details and the application are available on the ECMG website (<https://txmg.org/ellis/projects-and-programs/scholarship-and-grants-program>).

Holiday ECMG Word Find!

Find these words from ECMG's November newsletter for a holiday win!

V B M H M S W E A E E C B Y I N K B I Y
 E N B R N B C N B X O I B E R H U G A K
 O Z Q P Z N J N L K O I I G O A X R Q I
 N P O G E J E Q R C Z N S I I B K D B Y
 H G E D A E S D H E L J N O E O O B K J
 G G I D Y L O A T A G Y G P G F H J W T
 E V W N J N R F O E V A B X W S L A K U
 E B I V O M K C I Q E L T E P Y R L S K
 S L J R N L R I C M U S Y I A J A A E X
 P A U S D A E T S E M O H U R J B P F W
 H I B Q H F P M B U B S T B J E I E I K
 M N B C F W D O E Y R F I H S F H N P Q
 I N R C P E N X U A J C A P P C T O Y O
 S E L I O N M M L L T R A S I E O V U I
 T R F T E Z Z O T Z V A R M R T I I Z Q
 L E A T D T H W R E N Z L I W A P W A P
 E P Y I G C J E S V B W Z K A Q L N T M
 T X F V S K E T Z K Y I A L I U Y H S B
 O W A S A K C I H C N R Y J Z N W H L G
 E S L I G G M W Z G L T F X N P G A R V

HERITAGE
 BLUEBONNET
 CHICKASAW
 BIOCHAR
 CHARCOAL
 KOHLRABI
 TALKING

MISTLETOE
 PERENNIAL
 PAWPAW
 HOMESTEADS
 HARVEST
 OKRA
 EVIDENCE

ROSE
 WINTERIZING
 JALAPENO
 SCHOLARSHIPS
 MELON
 EXPO