

E-Gardening Newsletter

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Go Wild for Wildflowers

EXPO '23 Speakers

March 25 ★ Waxahachie Civic Center ★ 9am-4pm



John Thomas
Wildseed Farms
in Fredericksburg



Andrea DeLong-Amaya,
Director of Horticulture,
Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center

See our list of fun and informative speakers on page 2 of this e-newsletter issue.



We have quantity and quality when it comes to young plants for sale. Plus, plenty of knowledgeable master gardeners to answer your questions.

EXPO '23 ★ Speakers ★ EXPO '23

10:00 ★ Our own Robert (Rob) Franks speaks on Pocket Prairies

Rob received a BS and a Master's degree at Texas A&M University in Science Education. His science coursework included chemistry, biology, and botany with additional coursework in entomology, mycology, microbiology, agronomy, soil science, and ecology. Rob is now working to develop "Pocket Prairies" using native plants and fauna of the Blackland Prairie that can be duplicated in every size yard to make it easier for any homeowner to adapt at least part of his/her landscape, and enable those homeowners to participate in saving our planet.

11:00 ★ John Thomas from Wildseed Farms in Fredericksburg speaks on, you guessed it, wildflowers!

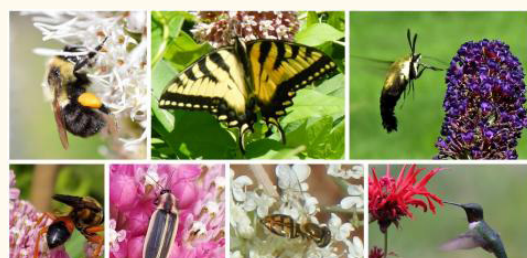
John is a native South Texan who grew up in a ranching family. Wildseed Farms was formed in 1983 in Central Texas. He has over 1500 acres of wildflowers and is considered a leading expert on the subject. John nurtures his astounding display of eye candy at the nation's largest working wildflower farm with close to 40 years experience under his belt. John will share his secrets on how to successfully grow wildflowers of your own. So join us and learn the WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and HOW to raise a miraculous color transformation of wildflowers.

12:30 ★ Our own Sara Gouge speaks on the intriguing world of pollination.

Born in Florida, the outdoor plant capital of the world, she enjoyed picking fresh fruit from trees and never shied away from getting her hands dirty. Her first job was working at a nursery at the young age of 15. Sara is both a master gardener and a master naturalist. Sara will take audience members on a journey to uncover the intricacies of how pollination takes place. It's fascinating.

2:00 ★ Andrea DeLong-Amaya, the Director of Horticulture at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center speaks on Texas native plants.

Andrea has been a staff member since 1998 and has nearly 30 years of experience with native plants in horticulture, ecology and garden design. She teaches classes, has contributed numerous gardening articles to a variety of publications and has appeared numerous times on PBS's Central Texas Gardener. Andrea will take audience members on a walk through the Botanic Garden of Texas. Gorgeous garden images along with discussions of unexpected ways to use Texas native plants are sure to inspire all those attending.



EXPO '23 ★ Childrens Workshop ★ EXPO '23

Come join us March 25th, in the Childrens Workshop, as we get "Wild about Gardening"!



We are excited to welcome Scout Woodward, from Texas Discovery Garden, who will be bringing live butterflies and moths to educate our kids on pollination and the life cycle of these winged beauties... and maybe even bring a few bugs to examine just for fun!

Amethyst Stone, who is the moderator of the Facebook page, *"What kind of snake is this? North Texas"* will be sharing with the kids her collection of native Texas snakes which will definitely bring a little "wildness" to our workshop!

Our Master Gardeners have presentations on bees and pollination, red wigglers for

soil enhancement and composting, planting, seed bombs and wildflowers with a special emphasis on our state flower, the bluebonnet. There will be plant give aways and lots of "digging in the dirt" activities and a take home craft or two. Our sister organization, Master Naturalists, is always on hand to encourage our understanding and appreciation of the "wild" world around us.



WILDFLOWER OF THE MONTH

by Melinda Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener Emeritus

Prairie Spiderwort

Dayflower Family (Commelinaceae) *Tradescantia accidentalis* (Britt.) Smyth

Region: 1 through 10 (Ellis County is in Region 4)

Size: 6 – 36 inches

Blooms: February – July, Perennial

Tradescantia species are in the same family as dayflowers. Like dayflowers, spiderworts bloom for one day, usually in the morning, but have three radially symmetric petals, whereas dayflowers are bilaterally symmetric, or have two large petals and one small one. The flowers of spiderworts are usually bluish purple, but are sometimes violet, pink or white. The plant itself is erect to trailing, with succulent stems. Alternate, narrow leaves are a foot or more long and look as though they have been folded lengthwise, sheathing the stem. The top two leaves subtend the flower cluster like bracts. Spiderworts do well in cultivation, preferring a moist, sandy soil. The succulent leaves and stems are edible, either raw or cooked, but the roots may be poisonous. The fourteen Texas species hybridize, making them difficult to distinguish.





February ~what to do~

The cold weather and freezing temperatures at the end of the year damaged grasses, plants and trees across the state. The coldest December in Texas in 40 years left gardeners dealing with the ugly aftermath in their gardens and yards.

“We now have a lot of ugly vegetation,” states Dr. Larry Stein of Texas A&M, Uvalde. “As we have said in the past, *learn to like ugly* for a while. He advises gardeners to leave damaged greenery in place and avoid pruning, weeding and cleaning up yards and gardens until the average last freeze date (March 15 in Ellis County).

While waiting out the weather, Dr. Stein offers this gardening guide:

Water and fertilize cool-weather annuals

Continue to water and fertilize cool-weather annuals such as snapdragons, Bells of Ireland, stocks, larkspur, pansies, violas and sweet alyssum to encourage the best blooms. Use a slow-release fertilizer.

Resist pruning bush roses and grapes until mid-February. Herbaceous perennials and hardy ornamental grasses may also be cut back at this time.

Transplant mature trees and shrubs, and plant bare-root plants

Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly the first year. When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially when dealing with bare-root plants. The medium to small sizes, 4-6 feet, are usually faster to become established and more effective in a landscape than larger sizes.

For extra help identifying what tree works best for your yard and tips on how to buy them, visit the Texas A&M Forest Service's [Texas Tree Planting Guide](#).

Check plants for winter pests

Check junipers and other narrow-leaf evergreens for bagworm pouches. The insect eggs overwinter in the pouch and start the cycle again by emerging in the spring to feed on the foliage. Hand removal and burning of the pouches reduce future damage.

Plan and prepare for spring flower and vegetable gardens

Make flower and vegetable garden plans now before the rush of spring planting. Time spent “armchair gardening” by the fireplace will pay off in improved plant selection. Besides, it's fun to page through the garden catalogs, books, and websites while contemplating changes in your garden.

Sow seeds in flats or containers to get a jump on plant growth before hot weather arrives. Petunias, begonias and impatiens should be sown in January or February. Warm-temperature plants, such as tomatoes, peppers, marigolds and periwinkles, should be sown in late January or early February.

Prepare beds and garden areas for spring planting. Till in several inches of compost, composted pine bark or similar material.

ELEVATED Raised Beds

Make Gardening Less of a Chore

Donna Summerlin, ECMG Intern

Does your back ache after a long day of gardening? Do your knees get sore from kneeling while you plant, weed or harvest your vegetables? Do rabbits routinely nibble your lettuce, beets, or kale? Do you have a limited amount of space for a garden? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, an elevated garden bed may be the answer to your garden woes.

Gardening in an elevated bed offers a means of planting a productive garden in a small space with less back-breaking work. It's a cross between a container garden and a raised bed garden and offers the advantages of both gardening methods with the added benefit of being adjusted to a height that enables the gardener to maintain the bed without kneeling, stooping or bending. A traditional raised bed has no bottom and is relatively large, while a container garden has a base to contain the plants and growing media and is much smaller than a raised bed. An elevated garden bed is larger than a container garden while it completely encases the growing media unlike in a traditional raised bed. Since it is raised to a working height, it allows people with physical limitations or mobility issues to grow fruits, vegetables, herbs, succulents and flowers more easily. An elevated garden bed is also ideal for gardeners living in apartments or condos, as long as the bed can be placed in an area that receives adequate sunlight.

Other advantages of elevated garden beds include:

- No weeds
- Easier pest management
- No concerns about poor soil conditions, such as alkaline, rocky soil or oversaturated clay soil
- No rabbits or other furry creatures nibbling on vegetables
- No soilborne fungal diseases

Once you've decided to add an elevated garden bed to your space, you should choose the plants you want to grow. The plants selected should have similar light, water, pH and nutrient requirements. Determining the plants you will grow will help you decide on the size and type of raised garden planter that will best suit the needs of the plants you have selected.

The next step is to decide whether to buy or build the planter. Ready-made elevated garden planters are offered for purchase online or at some retail stores. They can also be assembled by a handy DIYer using plans found



online. Some key considerations when choosing an elevated garden planter include the following:

- The height of the planter should allow you to work in it comfortably.
- The planter should have adequate drainage.
- Materials used to construct the planter should be rot-resistant, rust-resistant, sturdy, and long-lasting.
- The legs or other structures used to raise the bed should be strong enough to support the weight of moist soil and mature plants.
- The planter should be deep enough to accommodate the plants you plan to grow.

Placement of the elevated bed is also important to ensure the success of the garden. Most vegetables and sun-loving annuals require six to eight hours of direct sunlight, so the bed should be placed in full sun when growing these plants. If shade-loving plants will be grown, the bed should be placed in a shady spot. It's also a good idea to place your elevated garden bed near an outdoor faucet or rain barrel.

After the planter has been selected and placed, it should be lined with a material that allows for good drainage if the drainage holes are large. This will prevent the growing media from escaping through the drainage holes. The type of growing media used to fill the planter should be selected to meet the water, nutrient, pH and physical support needs of the plants selected. Vegetables require well-draining, nutrient-rich soilless or soil mixtures, while succulents require sandy mixes for optimal plant health. Fertilizers should also be added to the growing media before planting.

Once the growing media and fertilizer have been added to the elevated garden bed, it's time to add the plants.

After setting up your raised bed and then maintaining the proper water and nutrient levels, you can enjoy a successful garden in your elevated bed with minimal pain and effort.

For more information on growing a variety of plants in containers, including elevated garden planters, check these sites:



https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/files/2010/10/E-545_vegetable_gardening_containers.pdf

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/misc/container.html>

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/roses/container.html>

<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/flowers/daylilies/daylilygardening.html>

for instructions to build the bed pictured above:

<https://www.tidbits-cami.com/diy-raised-garden-beds/>

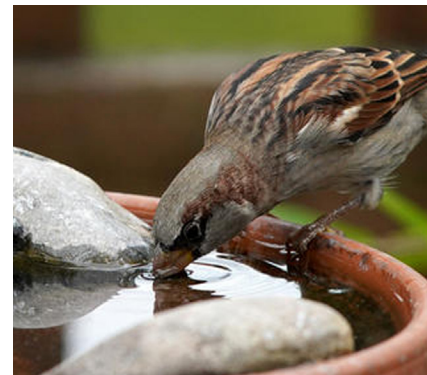
Are you thinking about adding a bird bath to your landscape?

Bird Baths 101

Elizabeth Norris, ECMG intern

If you enjoy bird watching, then a properly placed and maintained bird bath may be a good idea! Here are some simple tips to consider before taking that plunge.

Location: Where to place your birdbath is very important. Birds like to feel protected and that protection comes from cover in the form of trees, shrubs, and other structures. Look for a space at least 30 feet from windows and away from feeders, which keeps it cleaner. Position your bird bath in an open area but within 10 feet of a shrub or tree which will provide an escape route if needed. Keeping your birdbath out of direct sunlight will help reduce the loss of water from evaporation. Finding a cooler, shadier spot will prevent the formation of algae as well as prevent insects from laying their eggs on the warmer water's surface. If you don't have a fully shaded area, then finding a place that has shade during the mid to late afternoon is the next best place.



Size: While some smaller bird baths are cute and add architectural interest to your landscape, larger bird baths with wider bowls are best to attract your fluffy feathered guests. The bowl doesn't need to be very deep. Just one to two inches deep is enough for most song birds. If your bird bath bowl is deeper than 2 inches, then add a large enough stone to the bath where the birds can stand. Also look for somewhat smooth surfaces but not overly smooth and slippery which could make it difficult for secure footing.

Maintenance: One of the best things you can do to attract more birds to your bird bath is to keep the water fresh. Include refreshing your bird bath water along with your regular yard watering routine. Clean your bird bath every 1-3 days, depending on the amount of activity and use you observe at your bird bath. Simply dump the remaining water and refill with fresh water. If your bird bath bowl has a lot of textured surfaces, then use a scrub brush or pressurized water hose to remove built up debris. Regular dumping of the water will also help prevent mosquitoes from breeding in the water. Remember that birds can carry pathogens so be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling bird baths, feeders, or nesting boxes. It's also a good idea to keep a designated bird bath scrub brush that you clean well after each use. To keep your bird bath fresher, use one-part regular distilled vinegar in nine parts of fresh clean water for your rinse and scrub routine. Some authorities suggest sterilizing your birdbath at least twice a year. For additional information on this, you can check out this website for in depth instructions:



[How To Clean a Bird Bath Correctly & Safely \[Easy Method\] \(wildyards.com\)](https://www.wildyards.com/how-to-clean-a-bird-bath-correctly-safely-easy-method/)

Another part of maintenance is preventing algae growth in your bird bath. Submerge a piece of copper tubing in the water which is not harmful to birds and will slow the growth of algae in the birdbath water. Placement, as suggested earlier, in a shaded or partly shaded area will further reduce algae growth. Temperature regulation is another key aspect of bird bath maintenance. During colder months, adding a heater is a very good idea. Even something to keep the water moving will help slow the freezing process. During hotter seasons, add a block of ice to your bird bath water. The ice will float and melt as the day heats up. Birds will definitely enjoy the cool sip of water as well as a cool dip! Hopefully these tips will help you and your yard birds have a successful and beautiful friendship!

Should you keep a Garden Journal?

Alicia Wasson, ECMG intern



A garden journal can be a lined notebook or an inexpensive composition book for recording dates, plans and jotting notes about your garden. It can be a printed journal divided into sections with labels and prompts. Or, if you are creative, a journal can be embellished with pictures of your garden, colorful notes and detailed layouts. If you are digital, a document or spreadsheet on your computer or a garden mobile app on your phone or tablet may serve you.

Whichever format you prefer, simple or detailed, a journal can be an important tool for many gardeners to track, manage, and plan their gardens effectively.

Journal topic ideas you may want to consider tracking:

Year-over-year records

- Key dates from your monthly calendar
- Garden improvement and plant expenses
- Plant propagation
- Plant successes and failures

Plant Inventory

- Purchase dates and cost
- Botanical names, varieties and requirements
- Seed packet inventory & storage

Pest Control

- Garden pollinators and pests
- Treatments

Lists

- Plants to buy
- Record purchases
- Plants that were successful

Monthly Calendar

- Rainfall and first/last frost dates
- Tasks and activities to perform by month
- Daily high and low temperatures
- Planting and bloom dates

Landscape sketch and mapping

- Location of plants and trees
- Location of water faucets and sprinklers

Water management and irrigation

- Sprinkler locations and maintenance
- Watering schedule

Soil Amendments and Treatments

- Soil Formulas
- Fertilizer

It might serve you best to first try a simple method making notes as you perform activities to determine what you want to track.

Once you get into the habit of documenting then you can invest in a more organized or detailed method.

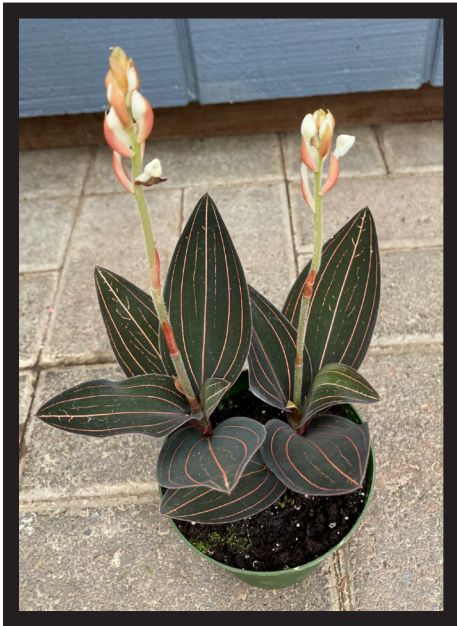
Happy journaling!



Black Jewel Orchids

Marj McClung, ECMG

There are plants for all types of gardeners. There are even orchids for lazy, inattentive house plant people. Black Jewel Orchids aren't demanding and require only regular house plant care. They aren't spectacular, but are pretty and they let me truthfully say, "Why, yes, I've grown orchids for years."

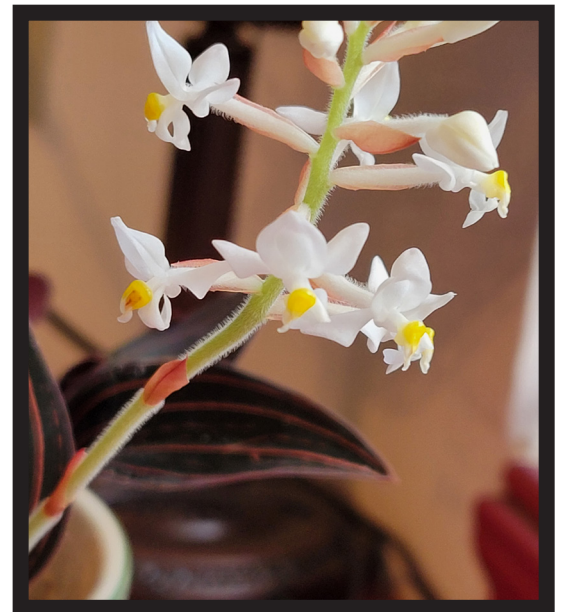


The plant is *Ludisia Discolor*, a species of terrestrial orchids. They grow in soil in tropical forests of southeast Asia. This means they will grow well in regular potting mix. The canopy of the forest protects them from sun, so they like indoors or a shaded patio in summer. They like bright light but not full sun, so you can put them in the north or east-facing window. Although they like humidity, I've found that they do well in the normal climate of kitchen or bedroom without adding humidity. They can't take cold weather, so if they are on the patio, bring them in for winter.

Black Jewels don't like wet feet but have shallow roots, so water lightly about once a week. I tend to forget this and my plants tolerate getting dry, but are more lush when I make the effort to water more often. They are not heavy feeders, so one a month with regular house plant fertilizer will do. I tend to forget this also and my plants do well anyway. I haven't had pest problems and I've planted in non-sterilized soil, so they seem to be disease resistant.

Much like purple heart, these orchids grow with segments trailing over the pot to get down to the forest floor. When a segment breaks off, just stick it in soil to propagate. Although they have shallow roots, they do need heavy pots or to be put into heavy cache pots. The trailing over the edge habit can go on for several feet if on a taller shelf and can mean that more plant ends up out of the pot than in it. Then the weight can pull the plant off the windowsill or shelf.

The beauty of Black Jewel Orchids is in the leaves. These are dark green velvety leaves with pink to maroon and silver pinstripes. The flowers are very small, white blossoms on stalks. If Barbie can't wait for the Banksia roses for her bridal bouquet, she can use these orchids and marry in late January to early February. Though not as spectacular as other orchid blossoms, the Black Jewel flowers bloom at the right time when you long for blossoms to mark winter's end.



These orchids are not commonly available although Calloway's has had them. They are for sale on the internet, but the best way to get one is free from a propagation addict.



Bug o' the Month

Kim Rainey, ECMG

Cochineal scale (*Dactylopius coccus*)

Have you ever noticed a prickly pear cactus with white fuzz on it, especially around the thorns? That's the tell-tale sign of the presence of cochineal scale bugs. And, while these little guys are unsightly, they hold a secret many people don't know.

When cochineal are removed from the plant, dried, and crushed they produce a bright red powder which is a popular and safe red dye. Yes, that's the truth! Some of the foods we eat contain crushed bugs. So does lipstick, and also yarns that are naturally dyed. In foods, just look for Natural Red Dye #4. It also might be named Carmine or Cochineal.

The process of getting dye from cochineal was first developed by the Aztecs. In the early 1500s, when the Spaniards saw the beautiful red color produced by this dye, they began importing it to Europe. It was a huge success. Many attempts were made to bring the cactus and the bugs to Europe to be grown locally. All attempts were met with disaster though; the weather just wasn't right. So cochineal red dye continued to be imported until the mid-1800s when chemical dyes were developed from coal tar. Today commercial cochineal farming is a relatively small industry.



cochineal scale
(*Dactylopius coccus*)



Adult male cochineal are winged, never eat and die shortly after fertilizing a female's eggs. The females, meanwhile, insert their needle-like mouth parts directly into the prickly pear cactus and spend their whole lives drinking prickly pear juice and covering themselves in fluffy white, protective wax.

When the Lone Star flag was adopted in 1839, the red field was dyed with cochineals.

Suppose you have an infested cactus and don't want to produce your own natural dye for your home spun yarn. You can reduce the damage from high populations of scale insects by applying systemic insecticide products, such as those containing dinotefuran or imidacloprid. Be careful to follow the directions when you use a new-to-you insecticide

product. Spray only a part of a larger plant to make sure the insecticide is not toxic to the plant. Symptoms of toxicity include discoloration or burning on edges, tips of leaves and growing points. Thus far, there has been little research conducted on best practices for insecticide use on Texas landscape succulents and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service cannot ensure the effects or effectiveness of insecticide treatments.

<https://texascooppower.com/the-bugs-that-make-you-see-red/>

<https://citybugs.tamu.edu/2020/02/26/a-prickly-situation/>

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/648050/cochineal-insect-red-dye>