

# E-Gardening Newsletter

Big Bend National Park

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## EXPO '23

*We're going Wild for Texas Wildflowers*

**March 25, 2023 ★ Waxahachie Civic Center**

**Featuring keynote speakers:**

**John Thomas,**  
*Owner & founder of Wildseed  
 Farms in Fredericksburg*

**Andrea DeLong-Amaya,**  
*Director of Horticulture from LBJ  
 Wildflower Center in Austin*

**Plants Sales**

**Ask a Master Gardener  
 Booth**

**Childrens' Educational Area**

**Landscape and Gardening  
 Vendors**

**Doors open at 9:00 a.m.**



## PLANTING

- Plant trees, shrubs and woody ornamentals from nursery containers. Plant slightly above ground line to allow root flare to be exposed.
- Transplant small trees and shrubs while they are dormant. Water the plant well before digging.
- Plant cold-tolerant herbs such as chives, cilantro, garlic and parsley. Onions from transplants can be planted late month.
- Seed for warm-weather annuals can be planted in flats in a temperature-controlled environment. Tomatoes and peppers, especially those hard-to-find varieties in the spring, can be started from seed mid-month. All require bright light and warm temperatures (60-70°F). Use grow lights for best results.
- Tulip and hyacinth bulbs, which have been chilled for eight weeks, should be planted immediately.
- Plant blackberries, fruit and nut trees. Cultivar or variety selection is critical. Contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Ellis County at (972) 825-5175 or visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut> for recommended varieties.

## PRUNING AND FERTILIZING

- Prune trees, including live oaks and red oaks, to remove dead, broken and unwanted branches. Apply pruning paint to any cut/wound on your oak trees to prevent oak wilt.
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs as needed. Apply a liquid root stimulator monthly.
- Peach and plum trees should be pruned to stimulate lateral branches and keep their “bowl” shape. Thin out branches to open the center to allow more sunlight resulting in fruit production over the entire tree.
- Apply blood meal or a slow-release fertilizer to pansies and other cool-season annuals.
- Maintain free-form crape myrtles by removing “sprouts” growing from the base, but NEVER cut the tops out. It produces unsightly knots and delays blooming. Removing spent seed pods is okay.

## GARDEN WATCH

- Remove by hand broadleaf weeds, such as clover, dandelions, henbit and chickweed in lawns and beds. If necessary, spray turf with a broadleaf herbicide when temperatures are above 70°F. Be careful when using herbicides in flower beds to prevent the drift from harming desirable plants.
- Don't Guess. Soil Test! The best way to determine your soil's fertility needs is to have it tested. Contact the local AgriLife Extension office at (972) 825-5175 for a Soil Sample information form or go to <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu>

# Spring Planting Guide

You can often find planting charts sorted alphabetically by vegetable name, but our chart is sorted by planting date! This should help you calculate what to do next.

Vegetables	Spring Planting Based on Avg Frost-Free Date	Days to Maturity
Onion (Plants)	Jan 1 - Feb 15	80-120
Onion (Seed)	Jan 1 - Feb 15	90-120
Peas, English	Jan 20 - Mar 3	55-90
Spinach	Jan 20 - Mar 10	40-60
Beets	Feb 1 - Feb 15	50-60
Broccoli	Feb 1 - Feb 15	60-80
Brussels Sprouts	Feb 1 - Feb 15	90-100
Cabbage	Feb 1 - Feb 15	60-90
Cabbage, Chinese	Feb 1 - Feb 15	65-70
Carrot	Feb 1 - Feb 15	70-80
Cauliflower	Feb 1 - Feb 15	70-90
Garlic	Feb 1 - Feb 15	140-150
Potato, Irish	Feb 1 - Feb 15	65-100
Asparagus	Feb 1 - Mar 1	700 (2 years)
Chards, Swiss	Feb 1 - Mar 3	45-55
Collard Greens	Feb 1 - Mar 3	50-80
Kale	Feb 1 - Mar 3	50-80
Kohlrabi	Feb 1 - Mar 10	55-75
Turnip Greens	Feb 1 - Mar 10	30
Turnip Roots	Feb 1 - Mar 10	30-60



Vegetables	Spring Planting	Days to Maturity
Parsley	Feb 1 - Mar 15	70-90
Lettuce	Feb 1 - Mar 31	40-80
Cilantro	Feb 1 - Apr 1	40 - 60
Radish	Feb 10 - Apr 15	25-40
Beans, Snap Bush	Mar 18 - Apr 15	45-60
Beans, Snap Pole	Mar 18 - Apr 15	60-70
Beans, Lima Bush	Mar 18 - Apr 15	65-80
Beans, Lima Pole	Mar 18 - Apr 15	75-85
Corn, Sweet	Mar 18 - Apr 30	70-90
Cucumber	Mar 18 - Apr 30	50-70
Mustard Greens	Mar 18 - Apr 30	30-40
Tomato	Mar 20 - Apr 30	55 - 100
Squash, Summer	Mar 25 - Apr 15	50-60
Squash, Winter	Mar 25 - Apr 15	85-100
Pumpkin	Mar 25 - Apr 25	75-100
Watermelon	Mar 30 - Apr 30	80-100
Peas, Black-eyed	Mar 30 - Apr 30	60-70
Peppers	Mar 30 - May 30	60-90
Eggplant	Apr 1 - Apr 30	80-90
Okra	Apr 1 - Apr 30	55-65
Cantaloupe	Apr 5 - May 1	85-100
Potato, Sweet	Apr 15 - Jun 1	100-130
* Last avg. frost date March 20		
From Dale Groom, CEA-Horticulture, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Dallas, TX		





# MY FAVORITE TOOL

by Kim Rainey, ECMG



Poindexter and a suitcase of pansies.

One warm spring morning when I was a very little girl my mother took me outside to plant some Zinnia seeds. Later that morning she noticed she hadn't seen me in a while, so she came looking to see what kind of mischief I might be up to. She found me at the site of our seed planting and when asked what I was doing, I replied, *"I'm waiting for the flowers!"*

**Meet Dottie Love**, a 2022 Master Gardener and a member of the ECMG newsletter team. Dottie is a retired college art teacher with an eye for the fun and unusual. She owns a goose named Poindexter and loves nature, flowers and raising Miniature Zebu cattle.



This love of nature and shaping her world to invite wonder and joy has also given Dottie an appreciation of strong, reliable hand tools. Dottie's favorite tool (among many she values) is a pair of Swiss made hand pruning shears. These shears have steel blades and well-padded hand grips. Dottie says she is careful not to misplace them, unlike other day-to-day possessions, because they are the



To help with keeping tools handy while working in the garden, Dottie wears a denim tool belt in which to stash necessary items.



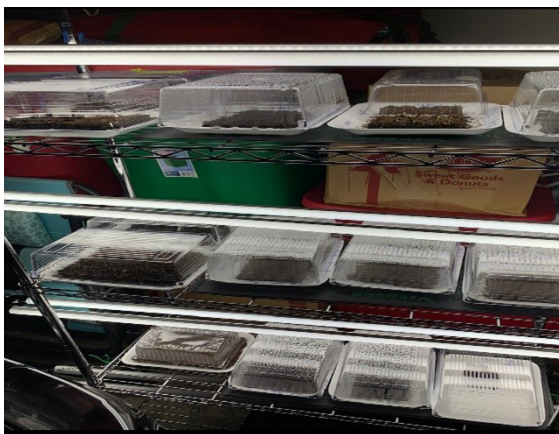
# Seed Starting

**Now, you may wonder** why you should start plants from seeds indoors when you can purchase plant starts. Honestly, because it's therapeutic! It is food for the soul to plant a tiny seed and watch the abundance of food or flowers that a seed can produce.

There are other practical reasons to start plants from seed in the comfort of your garage, kitchen, or greenhouse. Firstly, some seeds will not germinate when planted directly into the ground. Also, starting seeds indoors allows an impatient gardener like me to get a head start with plants that require a long growing season such as tomatoes and peppers. Additionally, starting plants from seeds can be more economical in the long run. Plus, there are many more seed options for plant varieties than transplants available for purchase at the local nurseries and hardware stores. Another therapeutic benefit is when it's too cold to play outside, starting seeds makes you feel like you're still gardening!

Let's start with the back of the seed packet; the most pertinent information is listed there. That tiny print that may require a magnifying glass to read indicates if the seed can be transplanted. If the packet states "do not transplant", don't, unless you have time and seeds to probably waste. Some plants, such as bachelor buttons or carrots, just want their roots to be left alone once they're planted. However, there are seeds like delphinium and lisianthus that prefer, or in some ways demand, to be started indoors, in a controlled environment. These prima donnas need to be pampered with the right temperature and lighting. They prefer not to experience the outdoors until they are old enough and strong enough to stand up for themselves. Other information also found on the packet includes light requirements, planting depth, and plant spacing. Some packets will list how many days to maturity or bloom. That's my favorite part, how long do I have to wait until I see a return on my investment of time and money? I like that question answered up front whenever possible.

However, don't let starting plants from seeds intimidate you. The process and equipment can be as simple or elaborate as your personality or budget prefers. In some cases, a sun-filled windowsill may do the trick to get your seeds started. Other options include using heating



mats designed for seed starting and grow lights. There are many seed starting kit options available online. A DIY setup was my preference. It includes a stainless-steel rack on wheels, heating mats, and a variety of grow lights that can be adjusted up or down as needed.

Whatever style of seed starting station you decide is best for you, an important practice is to always use clean containers and a sterile planting medium. Peat pots are a good option because the entire pot may be planted into the ground; but before planting, tear off the rim of the pot because the ridge inhibits water from

spreading throughout the root area of the plant. Another option for starting seeds is soil blocking which requires less space to start seeds than containers. The blockers are available in a variety of sizes and the size of the seed dictates the size of the block. It is an efficient



way to start hundreds of seeds in a minimal amount of space. Lisa Mason-Zeigler is a successful flower farmer and has free video series available on her website on soil blocking. I found the videos very helpful!

<https://thegardenersworkshop.com/seed-starting-saturdays/>

When to start the seeds? Again, the packet information is key and will state how many weeks before the first or last frost to start the seeds. What does first and last frost mean? Here in North Texas the first anticipated date in fall that frost will be on the ground is usually between November 16th and December 1st and the last spring frost day can be expected between March 1st and March 16th. However, this is Texas, and you probably already know that the weather is unpredictable. To help determine when to start your seeds, if the packet indicates 6 weeks before the last or first frost, then on a calendar count back six weeks from your first or last frost date based on the Texas AgriLife chart link below to find the date that you need to start your seeds. If your date is one or two weeks overdue, don't let that stop you from starting the seeds anyway. I have been late planting for as long as three weeks with wonderful success.



[https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/flowers\\_all\\_seasons/frostfall.html](https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/flowers_all_seasons/frostfall.html)

[https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/flowers\\_all\\_seasons/frostspring.html](https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/flowers_all_seasons/frostspring.html)

Whichever potting or seed starting mix you decide to use, it is helpful to add water to the mix first and then fill the containers. There are usually instructions on the back of the package to determine the ratio amounts. If you don't mix the growing medium and water first, the seed may float to the top of the water. When sowing your seeds, be sure to only plant as deep as the packet indicates. If you plant too deeply the seed may not come up. If the instructions are to surface sow, do just that. Sprinkle seeds on the surface of the potting mix and lightly press the seeds to ensure the seed makes good contact with the soil. Use a spray bottle filled with water to gently moisten the soil and seeds.

It will be necessary to check your plant babies at least once a day but that won't be difficult for you to remember because, like all babies, you'll want to check on them multiple times per day, talk to them, admire their growth, and ensure all of their needs are met.

The first set of rounded leaves are cotyledons and are not considered true leaves. The next set of leaves will look like the mature leaves of the plant. At this point, the plants may be given a diluted, liquid fertilizer, such as fish or seaweed emulsions. Be sure to check the label for proper feeding amounts.

Once the plant has grown a set or more of true leaves, they are ready to transition to the outdoors. But wait, don't plant them out yet! Instead, each day set the plants outside out of direct sun beginning with an hour or so per day to help avoid transplant shock. Increase the amount of time the plants are outside until they're able to remain outside all day without any adverse reactions. Now they are ready to plant into the ground.

*Enjoy!*

# Pecans and Puppies

By Lea Hunt, ECMG



Pecans, and walnuts too, are quite a treat for you and me but they can be toxic for dogs. We found out the hard way.

Our daughter raises Miniature Australian Shepherds and has brought the puppies to our house to run around and play in our yard which has a couple of gigantic pecan trees inside the fence. On one of their visits, we noticed one puppy not doing very well after being there for a while. He was very lethargic, drooling and had vomited, was having tremors, and didn't seem to be neurologically sound. We thought he was having a seizure. A Vet couldn't determine what caused it because, honestly, there are too many things it "might" be since puppies are known to play with, and eat, anything.

We did some research and found some disturbing things about pecans and dogs. Pecans have the compound juglone in them which is harmful to dogs (and horses too, by the way). Juglone

can cause tummy problems and vomiting. If there is an aflatoxin or mycotoxin from *Aspergillus* mold on them, it can cause the symptoms noted above in my daughter's puppy and also muscle weakness, fever, and seizures. Mold is more likely in nuts with shells still on, especially in damp conditions. In general, since pecans are high in fats and oils and dogs can be sensitive to foods with a high degree of fats, these nuts are not good for dogs.

We have older dogs and they eat pecans but have never had one symptom so we are inclined to believe puppies and their immature system might make them more susceptible to being affected. In our case, this beautiful puppy is just fine now. Keeping your dog out of the area where pecans fall is your first and best defense.

American Kennel Club article by Sassafra Lowrey, Nov 1, 2022.

<http://akc.org/expert-advice/nutrition/can-dogs-eat-pecans/>

Rogue Pet Science article "Can Dogs Eat Pecans? Here's what to know"

<http://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/11/09/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-pecans/>



## Why did the plant photosynthesize?

*It wanted a light snack.*



# ECMGA Christmas Auction

by Anne Nimblett, ECMG Intern

The delightful tradition of the ECMGA Christmas Auction continued this year on December 13<sup>th</sup>. Many members generously donated a variety of items, from unusual plants and garden tools to handcrafted jellies, soaps, and gift baskets. Also up for auction were beautiful artworks created by our very own members as well as many delectable treats. Master Gardeners and Interns in attendance browsed the aisles and jotted down their names, bidding on items in hopes of winning an auction or two. In all, forty-nine items were donated and auctioned, raising \$1,221.50. ECMGA will match \$500, bringing the final total donation to \$1,721.50. This money will be donated to Helping Hands of Ennis, Manna House, and Waxahachie Care, where it will help support those in our community who may be experiencing tough times. Thank you, Ellis County Master Gardeners and Interns, for making this a successful event once again!



# MEN AT WORK



Men at work, Master Gardeners Tom Graves and Josh Hershey laying cardboard (courtesy of Tom G.) and mulch on half of the berm at the Learning Garden, the other half is scheduled for mulching this January. Wood mulch was delivered by the City of Waxahachie Parks and Rec staff of Getzendaner, headed by Mr. Steve Ham.

Next time you see the park staff working, cleaning, mowing, or doing maintenance at our parks (yes, they will be working all through winter) let us thank them to acknowledge the good work they do for us in making the parks a safe, pleasant, and relaxing place to visit.

*Appreciatively, Allan Ramos*

## Wildflower of the Month

by Melinda Kocian, ECMG Emeritus



**Prairie Verbena** – Verbena Family (Verbeaceae)  
*Verbena bipinnatifida* Nutt.

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

**Size:** 12 – 18 inches

**Blooms:** Jan. – Dec., Perennial

Usually no more than a foot high and often reclining, prairie verbena sometimes paints large areas of lavender, pink, bluish or purple. Plants are hairy, with square stems, trumpet-shaped with five flattened lobes, the tiny flowers are clustered into half-globes. Opposite, stalked leaves are divided twice into finely cut foliage that adds a lacy background to the rounded flower clusters. Prairie verbena quickly

covers barren areas, but is crowded out as other species invade. It is an important nectar plant for butterflies, blooming throughout the year. It often roots from reclining lower stem joints. Texas has thirty-six species of verbena, many essentially similar.