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Life starts all over  
again when it gets crisp  
in the fall

## *It's Autumn....Finally!*

Acorns are pinging off the roof; leaves are starting to change color and slowly drift down to the ground; and the sandhill cranes are migrating south. IT MUST BE AUTUMN! Did you ever think it would get here? This is a glorious time of year in our area with cooler temperatures, butterflies swarming and garden flowers displaying their final show of brilliance and seeds. It's a joy to work outside again whether its preparing for winter or working on a fall vegetable garden. After a long, hot summer we think autumn will never come and when it finally does arrive sometimes it can be fleeting. So, get outside and enjoy all that autumn has to offer because before too long it will be hot, humid and uncomfortable again.

## *The Science behind Autumn Colors*

The job of a leaf on deciduous trees is food production. The work is done within the cells where carbon dioxide from the air and water sent up from the roots are turned into sugars in a sun-powered process called photosynthesis. Plant pigments such as chlorophyll collect the sun's energy for this process. During hot temperatures this process is repeated often to refresh the production in a tree. Chlorophyll cannot absorb green light so that's why leaves are green. When cooler temperatures and shorter days happen in the fall, several processes begin to happen. The chlorophyll starts to taper off; sugars in the tree start heading for the roots and those cells that are part of the process start to die. This process traps the sugars in the leaf which leads to increased pigments that give us the yellows, reds and oranges of fall. Eventually it also leads to the death of the leaf which causes it to fall off.

In Grimes County we don't get the brilliant colors of our northern neighbors but we do have a couple of trees that can give us some showy brilliance. One of these is the **Crape Myrtle** (*Lagerstroemia indica*). Crape myrtles put on colorful flowers throughout the summer months but when the temperatures start to cool off a change occurs where the flowers disappear to be replaced by a showy display of yellow, orange, purple and red leaves.

Another tree that is a favorite autumn superstar is the **Chinese Pistache** (*Pistacia chinensis*). This tree is a stand-out in Texas landscapes, easy to grow in most soils, and produces vibrant yellows and reds in the fall.



*Crimson Clover**Crimson Clover up Close*

## Cover Crops

There are a few cover crops for our area that can add color and nutrients back into the soil during the cooler months of the year. One of the most prominent is **Crimson Clover** (*Trifolium incarnatum*). If you have acreage that you want to improve the soil and provide showy red flowers in the winter, then crimson clover is a great cover crop. And it's not too late in November to sow the seeds.

Crimson clover is an upright, winter annual with deep red to scarlet flowers. It was originally native to Europe but then became naturalized in North America after it was introduced in the 1800's as a way to inject nutrients back into farmland. Today, its use is not as popular as an agricultural fertilizer but the benefits from planting crimson clover are impressive. First, its roots go deep into the soil opening it up for injecting nitrogen. It also controls weeds and root knot nematodes plus helps prevent erosion. For insects it provides an excellent breeding ground for ladybugs and earthworms and bees are highly attracted to it as well.

There are a couple of disadvantages to crimson clover. If planted with other wildflowers it will become very competitive and crowd out the other flowers. And it can only survive in the cooler temperatures we experience in the fall, winter and early spring.

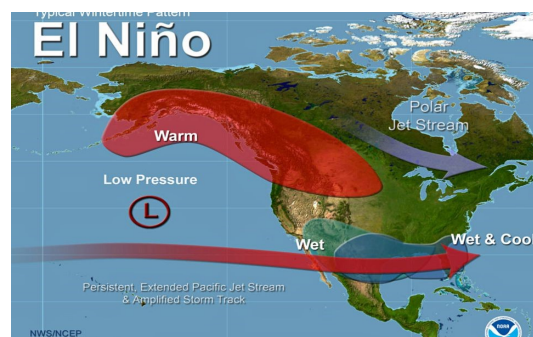
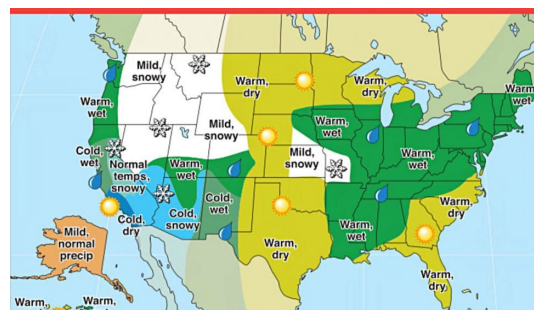
### Facts:

- Height: 6-12 inches
- Germination: 7-21 days
- Sowing Depth: 1/8" to 1/4"
- Blooming Period: December, February, March
- Seeding Rate: 15 pounds per acre

## *Winter Forecast for 2018-2019*

So, who is correct in predicting our winter weather forecast for 2018-2019? Do you believe the Old Farmer's Almanac founded by the eccentric Founding Father, Benjamin Franklin? The Farmer's Almanac has been uncannily accurate in its weather prognostications with a not-too-shabby 80 percent accuracy rate and is predicting a milder and drier Texas winter than normal. Not so quick, says NOAA. For Texas, going into the fall and winter months, a strong El Niño has been developing in the Pacific Ocean which usually leads to a wetter and somewhat cooler late fall and winter for the state. It does not typically bring extreme weather like that experienced in other parts of the United States.

By spring 2019 we'll know and it will be interesting to see who forecasted correctly. In any case, now is the time to prep your gardens for cold weather. Expect the worse and hope for the best!

*NOAA Winter Forecast 2018-2019**Old Farmer's Almanac Winter Forecast 2018-2019*



## *Native Plants in November*



As I walk each morning on our county road I get to see which native plants are still providing color and coverage along the roadside.

The **Rattlebush** that I mentioned

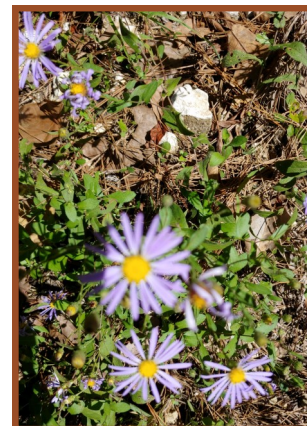
in the last issue are now all dried up and really are starting to rattle in the wind.

**White Gayfeather** is start-



ing to wither and go to seed.

And **Fall Asters** are still providing color and beauty. I'm collecting seeds if anyone is interested.



*Fall Aster*

## *Praying Mantis—beneficial or harmful?*



**Praying mantis** (*Mantis religiosa*) are **mostly** beneficial insects. The praying mantis is named for its prominent front legs, which are bent and held together at an angle that suggests the position of prayer. They can grow up to five inches with enlarged front legs and prominent eyes. They can turn their heads 180 degrees to scan their surroundings. Did you know they have two large compound eyes along with three other simple eyes located between

them? That's a lot of vision power for locating their prey. They also have wings but fly only to mate.

Praying mantis eat many insects that you don't want in your garden like aphids, moths, flies, crickets, squash bugs, and caterpillars. On the negative side, they can also eat honey bees, lizards, small tree frogs, mice, and small birds (including humming birds). The real negative is you don't get to choose what



they eat, so some of the good must come with some of the bad.

Praying mantis do not stalk their prey but instead ambush them. They sit and patiently wait for a passing insect to come too close and then grip them with their large forelegs which are covered in spikes. They eat only live insects then fastidiously clean their forelegs after eating.

While mating, females often decapitate and eat their partners! The female regularly lays hundreds of eggs in the fall in a small case. After three to six months the babies hatch looking much like tiny versions of their parents.

Praying mantis are found

throughout North America with about 20 native species present today. They have an average life span of about 12 months.



*Praying Mantis Egg Case*

## Schedule of Events

- Nov 9: Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Webinar: "Evaluating Various Soil Types", 11:00 a.m. (1 Hour)
- Nov 13: Grimes County Master Gardeners Monthly Meeting, 9 a.m.—11 a.m., Grimes County Fairgrounds, Navasota
- Nov 20: Brazos County Master Gardeners, "Home Composting: It's Easier than you Think", 6:00 p.m., Lick Creek Nature Center, College Station
- Dec 1: The Arbor Gate, "Christmas Open House", 2:00 p.m.—6:00 p.m., The Arbor Gate.

# November 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9 ★	10
11	12	13 ★	14	15	16	17
18	19	20 ★	21	22 	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1 ★

## Pictures from Trunk or Treat:

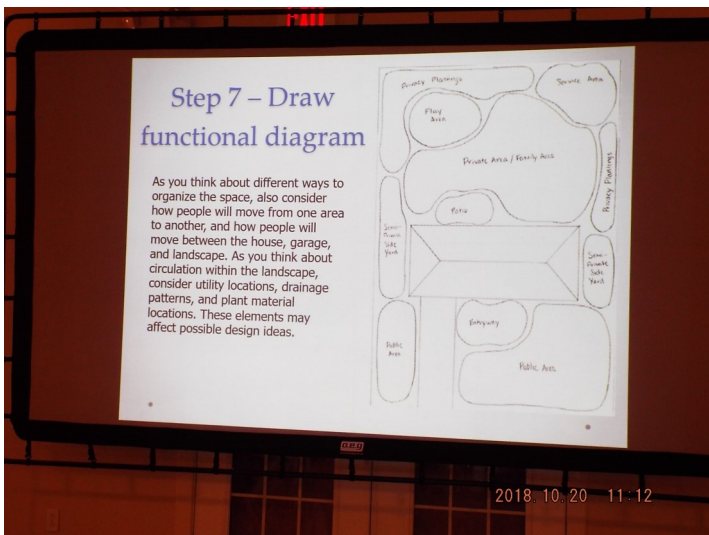
Trunk or Treat in Anderson was great fun with the kids who decorated 80 pumpkins this year!





## Homeowner's Landscape Design & Plant Selection Workshop

What a Success! Thanks to all the committee members and volunteers who helped with the October 20th Fall Workshop on **Landscape Design and Plant Selection**. There were 75 attendees in all—the largest workshop ever held by Grimes County Master Gardeners!



## Texas Master Gardeners

203 Veterans Memorial Drive  
Navasota, Texas 77868

Website: [txmg.org/grimes](http://txmg.org/grimes)



## Grimes County Master Gardeners

Please send submissions and photos by the  
20th of each month to: [pwparmley@gmail.com](mailto:pwparmley@gmail.com)



*Goldenrod*

### 2018 Board of Directors

President.....Michael Havens  
Vice President .....Sharon Murry  
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Nominating.....Carol Garnet  
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Timekeeping .....Martha Brogdon  
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2018 Fall Workshop .....Ann DeWitt  
2018 Buckingham Project .....Michael Havens/Cathey Hardeman