



Spring is in the Air

Dust off your wagons and get ready for all of the area plants sales (*see below*). Experienced gardeners have learned that getting the right plant for the right place leads to success. What better place to get those “right” plants than at the plant sales sponsored by area Master Gardener Organizations. This is where you can find Texas Natives, Adapted, Vegetables, and Herbs. These are proven champions that grow well in our area and can be hard to find in big box nurseries. We highly recommend you try at least one of these plants sales. Be ready though—competition is stiff—so get there as early as possible!

Daylight Saving Time is Sunday, March 10th



Benefits of Daylight Saving Time:

- Decreases residential electricity usage
- Decreases the number of traffic accidents
- Reduces crime
- Increases recreational time like **GARDENING**

Inside this issue:

<i>Wildflower Season</i>	2
<i>Native & Adapted Plants of Texas</i>	3
<i>March/ April Gardening Tasks</i>	4
<i>Easy Gardening: Squash</i>	5
<i>Three Sisters Gardening</i>	6
<i>Hugel Culture</i>	7
<i>Announcements</i>	8
<i>Training and Certified Master Gardeners</i>	9
<i>Continuing Education & Events</i>	10-11
<i>Grimes County Master Gardeners</i>	12

Area Plant Sales

- March 9: Waller County Master Gardeners. Vegetable, Herb, Ornamental Sale. 9:00—11:00, Waller County AgriLife Office, 846 Sixth Street, Hempstead.
- March 9: Walker County Master Gardeners. Spring Plant Sale. 8:00 , 102B Tam Road, Huntsville.
- March 15-16: Herb Society of America: Pioneer Unit. Vast Selection of Herbs, Natives, Perennials and More. 8:00—5:00, 248 Jasper Road, Festival Hill near Round Top.
- March 23: Brazos County Master Gardeners. Spring Plant Sale. Natives, Perennials, Herbs, Vegetables & Bulbs. 8:00—11:00. 453 County Park Ct, Bryan.
- March 23: Montgomery County Master Gardeners. Spring Plant Sale. 9:00—Noon. 9020 Airport Road, Conroe.

A new month
Push yourself
Rejuvenate
Inspire others
Laugh lots

Time to Take a Road Trip

Wildflower Season by Anja Pena, Master Gardener

According to the TXDOT website, there are over 5,000 species of wildflowers in the state of Texas. And the Texas Department of Transportation has worked for more than 90 years to conserve and preserve the state's wildflower species. Texas was among the first states to implement a program of planting wildflower seeds along the state's right of way. Since 1934 TXDOT does not mow the 1.2 million acres it oversees until after the spring flowering season ends. Every year the department buys and sows about 30,000 pounds of wildflower seeds along the more than 800,000 miles of streets and highways.



So this year, take a road trip during peak wildflower season and see how many of the beautiful flowers you can find. Here are a few of our local wildflowers and some random facts about them:



Bluebonnet

Bluebonnet (*Lupinus texensis*): The official state flower since 1901. On March 8, 1971, the Legislature amended the 1901 statute to include *Lupinus texensis* "and any other variety of bluebonnet not heretofore recorded." Essentially, all six bluebonnets found in Texas are now considered the official flower of the state.

Indian Paintbrushes (*Castilleja spp.*) The roots of this plant will grow until they touch the roots of other plants, frequently grasses, penetrating these "host" roots to obtain a portion of their nutrients. Transplanting paintbrush may kill it.

Common sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*). Texas boasts some 19 varieties of wild sunflowers, including Maximilian sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*) and swamp sunflower (*Helianthus anustifolius*). More than 20% of wildflowers are in the Sunflower family.



Prairie Verbena

Prairie verbena (*Glandularia bipinnatifida*) In the United States, it is found primarily in the Great Plains and in the Blackland Prairies of the Southeast. Grimes County is part Blackland Prairie, part Post Oak Savannah.

Coneflower (*Echinacea spp.*) Named for the prickly scales in its large conical seed head, which resembles the spines of an angry hedgehog (echinos is Greek for hedgehog).

Skullcaps (*Scutellaria spp.*) The generic name is derived from the Latin scutella, meaning "a small dish, tray or platter", referring to the shape of the calyx. The common name alludes to the resemblance of the same structure to "miniature medieval helmets".



*Indian
Blanket/Firewheel*

Indian Blanket/Firewheel (*Gaillardia pulchella*) The well-known flower heads are 1-2 in. across with a red center and a yellow outer band. Occasionally the three-cleft rays are solid orange or yellow. The disc flowers in the center are brownish red.

Washington and Grimes County Wildflower Loop

Directions: Navasota - Independence - Burton - Brenham - Chapel Hill - Washington-on-the-Brazos

Native and Adapted Plants of Texas

What is the definition of a native plant? There are several answers but basically it means plants that have been growing in the state before European settlers arrived. These are plants that have over the many years adapted to the soils and conditions in Texas no matter how harsh those conditions may be. Adapted plants are not native, but can still thrive in local conditions much like a native plant.

Why are Native Plants Important?

- Drought-tolerant, naturally conserving our precious water resources
- Provide habitat and food for birds, butterflies, bees and other wildlife
- Don't need special pampering or fertilizing
- Natural to their eco-system
- Help us maintain biological biodiversity

There are hundreds of plants that can be found on the **Native and Adapted Landscape Plants of Central Texas**. Here are just a few that grow in our area:



Turk's Cap *Malvaviscus arboreus*

- Grows 2-6' tall and 3-5' wide
- Sun or shade
- Blooms late spring to fall
- Prune to keep confined or when leggy
- Fruit for wildlife



Thryallis (*Galphimia glauca*)

- Grows up to 4-6' feet tall and wide
- Full sun to partial shade
- Blooms from spring to fall with yellow flowers
- Prune often to get best results



Plumbago *Plumbago auriculata*

- Grows 3-4' tall and 4-6' wide
- Sun/part shade (does best with morning sun and afternoon shade)
- Color is Summer Sky blue or white
- Prune often to get more blooms
- Deer resistant



Perennial Hibiscus, *Hibiscus moscheutos* (*not to be confused with Tropical Hibiscus*)

- Grows 3-5' tall and 4' wide
- Sun
- Blooms summer to frost
- Cut back to 6" after first hard freeze



Majestic Sage *Salvia guaranitica*

- Grows 3-5' tall and 4-5' wide
- Sun/ shade
- Blooms: Spring to summer
- Does best if sheared back 1/3 periodically

March / April Gardening Tasks



Soil Prep: As the days get warmer the urge to start planting increases but first make sure your foundation (your soil) is as rich as possible with added organic matter such as compost and worm casings. The mushroom compost from the Monterrey Mushroom Farm in Madisonville is a prime place to get good rich compost. Now is also a good time to get your soil tested. You can get soil testing bags at your local Extension Office.

Pruning: It's too late to prune large trees and especially don't prune back live oaks or red oaks. Try to prune only sprouts or small limbs of crape myrtles instead of topping them off.

Divide: Divide and move perennials, rose bushes and small trees but don't wait too long. *Remember, you don't amend soil for planting trees. They need to be planted in native soil*

Plant Herbs: Plant chives, catnip, comfrey, fennel, horseradish, oregano, thyme, rosemary, peppermint, parsley and lemongrass now but keep handy freeze cloth if a cold snap happens. These herbs will need protection.

Garden Design: Now is the time to assess your landscape. It's still early so some plants have not emerged yet. But you can research and design a cut flower garden this year. You can also do cut flowers in planters and containers. Once the soil temperature settles at 70 degrees or above, you can start sowing spring/summer flower seeds.

Fertilize: Hit citrus trees with high nitrogen fertilizer—fertilize every two weeks throughout the growing season. Established flower beds can use some slow-release fertilizer. Look for fertilizers that have equal numbers such as 10-10-10— or 20-20-20. They will provide a boost for new plants to grow.

Rotate Vegetable Areas: If you have not done so in a few years, it's important to rotate your vegetables around in your garden plot so that last year's tomato soil will get a rest. Refer to our article on crop rotation in our **September 2020** issue on our website.

Vegetable Planting Guide for Grimes County: Below are the suggested vegetable planting dates in our county.

	March	April	May	June
Bean, bush	3/10 - 5/5			
Bean, pole	3/10 - 4/10			
Corn, sweet	3/5 - 5/5			
Cucumber	3/20 - 6/15			
Eggplant	3/25 - 6/10			
Cilantro	3/1 - 3/31			
Dill	3/1 - 3/31			
Oregano	3/16 - 4/30			
Parsley	3/1 - 4/30			
Squash, summer	3/15 - 6/15			
Squash, winter	3/15 - 6/15			
Tomato	3/5 - 4/20			

Easy Gardening: Squash

Squash is a popular warm-season garden vegetable that grows well in all areas of Texas. Squash plants take up a lot of space, but because they are prolific producers it takes only a few plants to feed a family. Squash is one of the plants grown in the traditional Native American vegetable growing technique called the **Three Sisters** (*see next page*).

Here are the types of squash that are successful in our area:

Yellow Squash	Zucchini	Butternut
Early Yellow Crookneck	President	Preclude II
Dixie	Gold Rush	Waltham
Sundance	Ambassador	
Goldbar	Magda	
Horn of Plenty	Eight Ball	

Site Selection: Like most vining vegetables, squash grows best in sandy, fertile soils with a pH of between 6.0 and 6.5.

Soil Preparation: Squash grows best in soils that have lots of organic matter. If possible, spread 2 to 3 inches of organic material such as compost, leaves, or rotting hay over the planting area. Till to mix this organic material into the top 8 to 10 inches of soil.





Planting: Squash does not grow well in cool weather so plant in the spring after all danger of frost has passed. Plant squash in hills 18 to 48 inches apart on rows 3 to 8 feet apart. When planting squash seeds, plant five or six seeds about 1 inch deep in each hill. Water after planting. When the seeds emerge, thin them to three squash plants per hill.

Fertilizer: Add 2 to 3 pounds of fertilizer such as a 10-10-10, for each 100 square feet of garden area. If you plant only a few plants, use 2 to 3 tablespoons of fertilizer for each hill. Scatter the fertilizer over a 2-foot by 2-foot area then work it into the top 3 to 4 inches of soil.

Watering: Water the plants enough to keep them from wilting. If the weather is really dry, squash plants should be watered at least once a week. Sandy soils will need to be watered more than clay soils.

Care During the Season: Hoe around the plants to keep them free from weeds, being careful not to damage the roots. When the first blooms appear, place about 2 tablespoons of garden fertilizer around the base of each plant but do not let the fertilizer touch the plant. Water after fertilizing.

Watch Out for these Insects:

			
<u>Squash Vine Borer</u>	<u>Gray Aphids</u>	<u>Cream Colored Aphids</u>	
Control with Bt (Bacillus Thuringiensis) for prevention	To treat use Sevin Thiodan	To treat use pyrethrin	

Harvesting: Cut the stem 1 to 2 inches from the fruit when they are full sized, the skin is hard, and the bottom of the squash is cream or orange colored.

Storing: Yellow squash and zucchini can be stored in the refrigerator for about a week. They can also be canned or frozen for later use. Butternut squash can be stored in a cool, dry place for several months.

Article from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Easy Gardening Series

History of the Three Sisters Garden



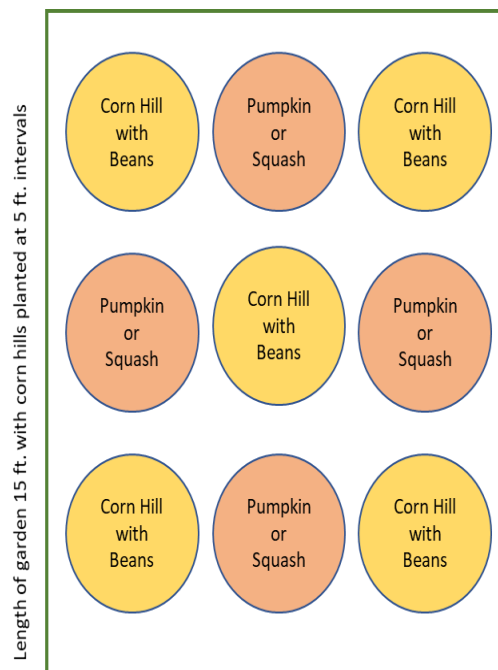
An old gardening technique that is still used today was developed by the Native Americans and subsequently introduced to the Pilgrims after they arrived in the New World. Not familiar with farming or how to survive in their new environment, the Pilgrims ended up depending on the nearby Patuxet Indians for survival techniques in hunting, gathering, and gardening. In fact, it was introduced by a famous Patuxet Indian named Squanto who taught the Indian tradition of growing corn, squash, and beans together, which has become known as the **Three Sisters Garden**.

While many Americans today think of Native Americans as wanderers moving from one place to another, the East Coast Native Americans were more stationary learning how to adapt the land to growing food. It's these Indians who first realized how well the "sisters" grew together, providing a productive and healthy diet.

Purpose of the Three Sisters Garden: The Three Sisters Garden is companion gardening at its best where the plants grow together to deter weeds and pests, enrich the soil, and provide support. Each "sister" contributes something unique to the group to ensure their success:

- Corn is often referred to as the **Older Sister** since it provides support for the beans.
- Pole Beans, often called the **Giving Sister**, enriches the soil with needed nitrogen, which benefits all the plants.
- Squash (or pumpkin), the **Protective Sister**, provides a tangle of vines and prickly leaves that shade the soil, prevent weeds, and deter animals like raccoons who don't like to step on the spikey leaves.

Layout of a Three Sisters Garden: There are different variations on the Three Sisters method, but basically, it requires planting the "sisters" in clusters on low wide mounds instead of traditional straight rows.



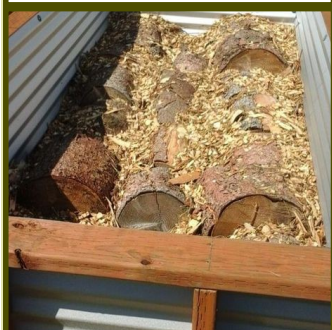
How to Plant: (see diagram)

- Plant the corn seeds in the hills spaced 5 feet apart, planting 4 seeds per hill. Each hill should be 18" in diameter.
- Wait until the corn plants are at least 4-6" tall before planting the bean or pea seeds. Plant in between the corn at the base on the same hill.
- At the same time plant the pumpkin or squash seeds using the same hill method. Each hill is again 18" in diameter with 4 seeds per hill.

When to Plant: March and April are the best time to plant in our area.

Types of Seeds to Plant:

- Pole Beans, Peas, Sweet Peas
- Sweet Corn
- Summer Squash, Winter Squash, Pumpkin, Cucumbers

*Hugel Culture Example**Easier Harvesting**Hugel Culture in Containers**Walled Hugel Bed*

Have You Ever Heard of Hugel Culture?

Have you ever heard of **Hugel Culture**? Well, it's a gardening technique developed in Germany hundreds of years ago. The actual name is Hügelkultur (pronounced Hoo-gul-culture) which means mound culture or hill culture. The idea behind this technique is to use existing logs, branches, leaves, grass clippings, and kitchen scraps in a mounded, no-dig bed to increase moisture retention, build up fertility and maximize surface areas for growing fruit, vegetables, and herbs.

There are several advantages to a hugel bed:

- The long-term decay of the wood and organic matter provide a consistent source of nutrients to plants.
- Soil aeration increases as the logs and branches break down.
- The logs and branches also act like a sponge, retaining water until a very dry spell then slowly releasing it. This decreases the use of watering and according to some sources after a couple of years no watering is required at all.
- The mound structure will allow a larger surface area for plants and easier accessibility for harvesting.
- You can also do hugel culture in any kind of container.
- And, the best part, you don't have to dig or till the soil.

There are some disadvantages:

- The first year the wood will actually steal a lot of nitrogen back from the surrounding biomass so if there is not a lot of organic material on top of the wood, gardeners will have to add an organic fertilizer to balance out the nutrients. Once the wood starts to decay, then it will begin to give nitrogen back to the soil, but this may take one to two years.
- Some types of trees like cedar and walnut can actually prevent germination. So, research which types of trees are the best.
- As the organic matter decomposes, the mound will shrink and eventually have to be rebuilt.

How to build your hugel bed:

1. Lay down logs first followed by branches.
2. Water these first layers well.
3. Fill in all the open spaces with leaf litter, manure and kitchen scraps.
4. Top off with 1" to 2" of soil and a layer of mulch.
5. Optimize height should be at least 3 feet or more if you are not using a container.
6. Allow the hugel bed to "cure" for a few weeks before planting. Many gardeners prepare the bed in fall for spring planting; however, once you feel the bed is ready then start planting and watch the results!

Announcements

Registration

Dive into the world of horticulture at the upcoming **Texas Master Gardener Conference**, where a stellar lineup of speakers promises to cultivate your knowledge and inspire your green thumbs.

- Registration is open until April 16th, midnight.
- Go to *Texas Master Gardener Website* for more information.



Do you Need a Guest Speaker at your Next Meeting?



On February 16th, Master Gardener Georgia Abraham presented to guests at Martha's Bloomers. The topic was all about Roses.

Speakers Bureau Contact: 713-392-0283

NAVASOTA PUBLIC LIBRARY

SEED LIBRARY OPENING

TEXAS
MASTER GARDENER

Learn what a seed library is and how it works.

Seed Swap

Bring seeds or plants to exchange with other gardeners.

March 4

begins at 5:30 pm
1411 E. Washington Ave.
Navasota, TX 77868

2024 Intern Class

Grimes County Master Gardeners are providing another intern training class which began in February providing our new student interns with 50 hours of classroom instruction in horticulture from Texas A&M AgrLife Extension. From there they will complete another 50 hours of service which will earn them the title of certified Texas Master Gardeners. See below our newest certified Master Gardeners from the class of 2023.



Class of 2023—Newly Certified!



*Standing with President, Sparky Hardeman, from Left to Right:
Anja Pena, Tricia Sass, Lori Brauchle, Daphyne Bennett*



Kerry Bost

Events

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their **March Business Meeting on Tuesday, March 12th—9:00 a.m., at the Navasota Center.**

March 2024

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
31						

Continuing Education and Events

- March 2-3: Brazos County Master Gardeners, **“B/CS Home & Garden Expo”**, 8:00—5:00 p.m. Saturday, 11:00—4:00 p.m. Sunday, Legends Event Center, 2533 Midtown Park, Bryan.
- March 7: Waller County Master Gardeners, **“Herbs in Every Garden”**, 9:00—10:00 a.m., Waller Extension Office located at 846 6th Street, Hempstead.
- March 9: Montgomery County Master Gardeners, **“The Ballad of Mee-Maw’s Figs”**, 9:00—11:00 p.m., \$5.00 Fee; 9020 Airport Road, Conroe.
- March 16, Grimes County Master Gardeners, **“Plant a Seed”**, 9:00—1:00 p.m., Tractor Supply in Navasota. Master Gardeners will demonstrate and assist children on seed planting and care.
- March 23: Brazos County Master Gardeners, **“Spring Plant Sale. Natives, Perennials, Herbs, Vegetables & Bulbs”** 8:00—11:00, 453 County Park Ct, Bryan.
- March 26: Brazos County Master Gardeners, **“Gardening in a Changing Climate”**, 7:00—8:00 p.m., Brazos County Extension Office located at 4153 County Park CT, Bryan.

Events

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their **April Business Meeting** will be replaced with a **Spring Social** on Saturday, April 13th—4:00 p.m., location and details to be announced separately.

April 2024

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				



Texas Master Gardeners

203 Veterans Memorial Drive
Navasota, Texas 77868

Website: txmg.org/grimes

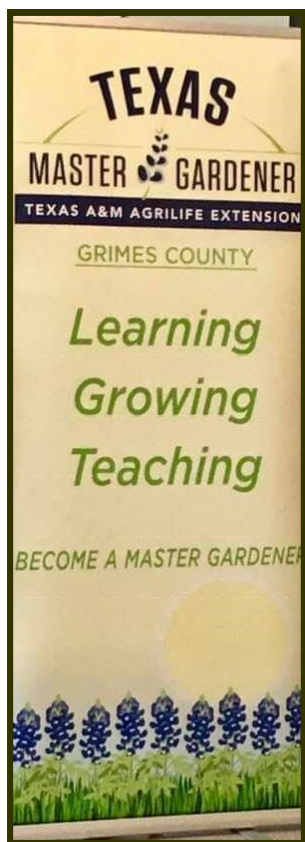
Facebook: www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners

GrimesCountyMasterGardeners



Grimes County Master Gardeners

Please send submissions and photos by the
20th of each month to: pwparmley@gmail.com



2024 Board of Directors

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Vice PresidentCathey Hardeman

SecretaryNancy Vidotto

TreasurerLayne Payant

2024 Committees/ Chairs

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Speakers Bureau.....Georgia Abraham / Paula Parmley

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