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*Get Ready—It's Spring*

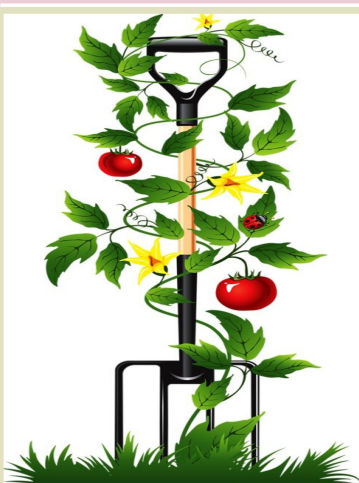
Time will tell if this is really an early spring or a fake out by mother nature. I'm betting on spring and so are the trees and plants. Many experienced gardeners have reminded us of those late freezes that have occurred in the past and the damage they have brought. However, it sure feels like spring to me and I'm going to go for it. Even if we do have a cold snap, I suspect it will only be a frost and not a hard freeze. If you are curious about the spring weather forecast and weather patterns, take a look at Page Three as we explain La Nina, Neutral and El Nino weather models. Otherwise, if you are like me, you are probably scrambling to get beds cleaned out, composted, and mulched in time to start planting. The big question is "what does this mean for summer"?

*Daylight Saving Time is Sunday, March 12th*



Benefits of Daylight Saving Time:

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



**Area Plant Sales**

- March 4: Waller County Master Gardeners. Vegetable and Herb Sale. 9:00—1:00, Waller County AgriLife Office, 846 Sixth Street, Hempstead.
- March 17-18: 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 25: Brazos County Master Gardeners. Spring Plant Sale. Natives, Perennials, Herbs, Vegetables & Bulbs. 8:00—11:00. 453 County Park Ct, Bryan.
- March 25: Montgomery County Master Gardeners. Spring Plant Sale. 9:00—Noon. 9020 Airport Road, Conroe

## 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 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:** 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			

## *Herb of the Month—Italian Parsley*



*Italian Parsley*

### **Italian Parsley**

(*Petroselinum crispum*) is a flat-leaf parsley which is much more flavorful than its cousin the curly leaf parsley. Due to it is better flavor it is a great favorite of cooks for soups and sauces. It has a distinctive flat leaf appearance very

similar to Cilantro and is often confused with the Mexican herb.

Italian parsley is a biennial which means that it grows for two years—in the second year of growth, the flowers produce seeds and then die. The leaves are still edible into the early part of the second spring, but as soon as the flower shoots appear, the leaves will be bitter, so you will need to pull out the plant at that point.

Italian parsley grows to about 12 inches mostly in a clump. They do great in cooler weather but will freeze if not protected.

While they do not like our Texas summers, you can successfully keep Italian parsley going if you plant it where it will get afternoon shade and heavily mulched.

One other benefit of planting parsley in your garden is that it's a favorite food of the striped caterpillar (called a parsleyworm) that becomes the black swallowtail butterfly. Simply by growing parsley, you'll be feeding butterflies as well. Just be sure to plant enough parsley to share with the caterpillars.

### How to freeze:

- Put cut parsley in dou-

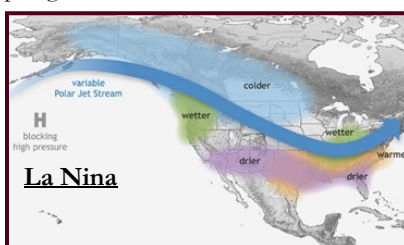
bled up freezer bags to use later in soups & sauces.

- Blend the parsley leaves only (picked from the stems) in a blender or food processor with enough water or olive oil to make a thick puree. Freeze in ice cube trays. Once frozen, transfer to freezer bags for long term storage.

## *Weather Patterns Explained*

What does a La Nina, Neutral or El Nino weather pattern mean? For the U.S., it all starts with the Pacific Ocean. During normal conditions (neutral) the trade winds blow west off the Pacific Ocean taking warm water from South America out towards Asia. To replace the warm water, cold water rises from the depths - a process called upwelling. El Nino and La Nina are two opposing climate patterns that break from the normal (neutral) condition. During El Nino the trade winds weaken, and warm water is pushed back east, toward the west coast of the Americas. This causes warmer ocean water which in turn causes the jet stream to move south of its normally neutral position. When this shift occurs, areas in the Northern U.S. are dryer and warmer than normal but, the U.S. Gulf Coast areas and the South become much wetter. The La Nina pattern creates very strong trade winds pushing more warm water towards Asia which results in an increase in upwelling in the Pacific. These cold waters push the jet stream northward which tends to lead to drought conditions in the southern U.S. and heavy rains in the Pacific Northwest.

Texas has been in an extended La Nina pattern for the past three years which means dryer than normal conditions and extended heat. Currently, the weather forecasters are saying the La Nina pattern is ebbing away and it looks like we will be oscillating into an El Nino pattern by early spring. We will see if the forecasters are correct as this plays out in Texas during the coming months.





## *Reusing Potting Soil*



Can you reuse potting soil? The short answer is “yes”, **IF** you know that the last plant growing in that potting soil was disease and pest-free. Most experienced gardeners don’t reuse their potting soil because of the possibility of contaminating new plants with old diseases or pests. However, with the cost of new potting soil rising, adding old soil to new soil is an economical way to make your potting medium go further. Here are a few steps you can take to sterilize, rejuvenate, and store your old potting soil to make it safe to reuse:

### Sterilization

- For small amounts of soil, you can try sterilizing by either baking the soil in the oven at 180 degrees for 30 minutes or microwaving. These two methods will kill most soilborne diseases and pests. However, the downside is you can only do small amounts at a time AND it might make your house smell.
- Another method is **solarization** which uses solar heat to kill off unwanted diseases and pests. You only need two things, clear plastic and sunlight. This is a great method for large quantities of plant soil. After removing any plant matter or clumps, lay down a clear plastic sheet and spread the soil on top up to 12 inches. Water until moist but not soggy wet. Next, cover with a second clear plastic sheet, tucking the top layer of plastic under the bottom layer. Leave the plastic covered soil in full sun for 4-6 weeks. You can also use clear plastic bags, black plastic bags or 5-gallon buckets. Make sure they are sealed off and left in the sun for the same amount of time.

### Rejuvenating

- Good potting soil is a mixture of ingredients that promote aeration, moisture retention and nutrients. Spent potting soil usually lacks some of these critical ingredients so you will need to rejuvenate or amend your old potting soil. Here are some ingredients you can add back in to make your soil more nutrient rich:
  - Perlite keeps your soil airier for good drainage.
  - Peat moss and sphagnum moss help promote better moisture retention. Perlite, peat moss and sphagnum should be added in equal parts to your soil mixture.
  - Test the pH level. Optimal potting soil pH should be neutral (between 6.5 and 7.5). You can purchase pH testing strips to check your soil’s pH. For acidic soil, add lime to bring it back to neutral. If your soil is too alkaline then add sphagnum moss or sulfur.
  - Fertilizers are usually added to modern potting soil so add slow-release ingredients with additional nitrogen, phosphorus, or potassium. Also composted organic matter will enrich your soil as well.

### Storage

- Once you have sterilized and rejuvenated your old soil, you will need to store it in airtight containers so that it doesn’t attract new pests or pathogens. The containers must be clean and sterilized so that common diseases that get onto tools are not passed back into the soil.

Finally, old potting soil, after it has been sterilized and rejuvenated, should be used as an amendment to new soil not as the **only** soil to be used in the garden.

## *How to Bring Sheltered Indoor Plants Outside*

No matter how cozy the greenhouse is in the winter, spring time is the best time to get out into the fresh air!

Your plants are no doubt equally eager to move outside and stretch in the sunshine. For best results, the plants you're moving from a sheltered greenhouse to the great outdoors should make the transition gradually. Wide variations in temperature or too much rain, wind, or sun all at once can damage tender young plants. Here are a few pointers to help them acclimate and thrive in their new home.

A week or more before you plan to move your plants outdoors, start the transition process, known as **hardening off**. Reduce frequency of watering and greenhouse temperatures, to help ease your plants into the shift.

**Watering:** Your seedlings can go a little dry between watering before they're set outside. Bottom watering is best, since overhead watering can cause foliage diseases. As you water less frequently, check the plants. If they don't droop, they're probably strong enough to start the transition.

**Temperatures:** The 85-degree temperatures that you needed for your seeds to germinate should be brought down to around 65 degrees for seedlings. A thermometer is the easiest way to monitor the temperatures in the greenhouse, so you can make adjustments with heating and ventilation.

**A visit to the Porch.** An unheated, protected area will allow plants to gradually adjust to cooler temperatures. A porch or enclosed deck can be a great transition space between the greenhouse and garden. If you ventilate the space, keep the plants away from drafts. If such an area is not available, you can also shelter your plants under an evergreen or in the shade of your house.

**Field Trips:** Take your plants outside on mild days when there is little wind or precipitation. Frost or fabric covers can be used for extra protection. Just be sure that the plants aren't being pressed upon directly.

### **Moving Day!**

For container plants, wait until it's in the high 50's or low 60's to move them outside. If it's dry, sunny, and hot, put the plants out later in the day, so there will be some shade and cooler air. A slight drizzle is good, if the air isn't cold.

For plants being transplanted in-ground, soil temperature is even more important than air temperature. So test the soil temperature for a few days. Remember, nighttime soil temperatures will be lower, and shouldn't drop below 60 degrees.



A Pot Lifter makes it easier to move your heavy pots from the greenhouse.

Hardening off is a simple process, requiring just a little time and a lot of love. Gently ease your plants into outdoor living, and they should quickly start thriving in their new environment.

## *How to Care for Air Plants*



You see them in garden shops, big box stores and in magazines. They are called “air plants” but what are they and how do you care for them? Air plants (*Tillandsia* spp.) are epiphytes which means plants that grow harmlessly upon other plants. They belong to the bromeliad family and are gaining popularity as house plants because they are unusual looking and require little care. Bromeliads are native in zones 9 and higher in Central and South America, the Southern U.S. and the West Indies.

Air plants use other plants for support as they use their root system only for attachment. They are not parasites and they do not damage the support plant. *Air plants get their common name because they absorb all of their nutrients and moisture from the atmosphere.* Small flowers will form in late winter or mid-summer. After the mature plant flowers, it will die, but new plants called “pups”

will develop from the base of the parent plant.

### How to Care for Air Plants



Air plants require proper light, air circulation and water. They need bright, filtered light but do not place them in direct sunlight. They will need to be watered once a week by either misting well or submerging in plain water for 20-30 minutes. Excess water can collect between the leaves so it is recommended to gently shake to remove moisture and then set the plant upside down to allow excess water to drain out to prevent rotting. You can tell if the plant is not receiving enough water if the leaves start to curl and the tips turn brown. Good air circulation is also an important factor. Fertilization is not necessary, but air plants will be more vigorous when fertilized with a light application once a month with a liquid fertilizer made especially for bromeliads. Dilute the recommended dosage by  $\frac{1}{4}$  and add to your normal watering schedule.

### Displaying

Due to their unique nature, air plants can be displayed in a number of ways. They can be attached to bark, shells, rocks or placed in shallow dishes. The current trend is glass globes or creative plant stands made especially for air plants. They can also be hung by fishing line or thin wire but make sure whatever display you use that they do not collect any water.





GRIMES COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

# Speakers Bureau

Do You Need a Guest Speaker?



The Grimes County Master Gardener Association has a Speakers Bureau made up of friendly, knowledgeable Master Gardeners! We offer speakers on a variety of topics to garden clubs and other organizations upon request.






Please contact us 936-873-3907 or send an email to request a speaker at [grimescountymastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:grimescountymastergardeners@gmail.com)

**Events**

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their **March Business Meeting on Tuesday, March 14th—9:00 a.m.** at the Navasota Center, Bluebonnet Room.

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have an information booth at **Tractor Supply (Navasota), March 4th from 9:00 am. To 1:00 p.m.**

# March 2023

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 / Events**

- March 11: Montgomery County Master Gardeners: “Florals & Herbs”, 9:00 a.m. —11:00 a.m., Conroe, Texas—\$5
- March 28: Brazos County Master Gardeners: “Health & Fitness for Gardeners”, 7:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.
- April 25: Brazos County Master Gardeners: “Horticultural Wonders of the World, 7:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

**Events**

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their April **Business Meeting as part of their Spring Social on Saturday, April 22nd, 4:00 p.m.** Abraham Residence (King Oaks).

# April 2023

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



# Texas Master Gardeners

203 Veterans Memorial Drive  
Navasota, Texas 77868

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

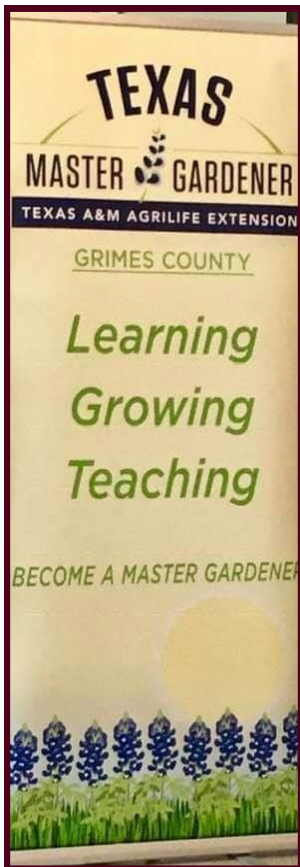
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners](http://www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners)

GrimesCountyMasterGardeners



## Grimes County Master Gardeners

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



### 2023 Board

- President.....Sparky Hardeman
- Vice President .....Cathey Hardeman
- Secretary .....Nancy Vidotto
- Treasurer .....Kyle Braswell

### 2023 Committees/ Chairs

- Auditing.....Jena Jackson
- Community Garden.....Kady Hackenberg
- Co-op.....Jena Jackson / Ron Jackson
- Fundraising .....Carol Garnet
- Intern Class Coordination .....Herb Abraham
- Junior Master Gardener.....Patti Sexton
- Newsletter .....Paula Parmley
- Nominating.....Carol Garnet
- Social Media.....Jamie Bruns
- Timekeeping .....Martha Brogdon