



# INSIDE DIRT

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### President's Musings



**Delbert W. Hirst, Master Gardener**

*Musings after nearly a year as the President of the Henderson County Master Gardener Association.*

I started out 2022 as Vice President, responsible for Programs and Administration. This was the position I held last year in 2021. I loved finding programs that I thought the rest of you would find interesting and educational, as well as being responsible for finding meeting locations and special events like the Christmas Awards event. I was up to the challenge of out doing myself in 2022. Thus, I wasn't quite prepared mentally for assuming the responsibilities of the President when it became necessary for Sara to step down to take care of her family. But what can you do but step up and do the best you can.



Bob Ericson has been an officer and on the board for several years and he was ready to step away. However, because of the difficulties of getting someone to take my place on the board, he stepped up...again. This is important to note: I didn't lead the Association alone! The support I received from the other Board Members and past Presidents was without a doubt the reason I got through this year without terrible mishaps.

The Association practically ran itself because of the dedication and drive of our Master Gardeners. For example, we had an amazing plant sale to raise funds for the Association, because of the team work. The Greenhouse work responsibilities were organized by Yvonne Sparks and Barbara Thompson. They worked in conjunction with their team to grow the plants we would sell. Also vital to this effort, with their amazing organizational skills, was Judy Haldeman and Elizabeth Crowe.

The Harvest Garden became the perfect example of backyard gardening because of the work done by Sherry Sorrell, John Maloch and their team.

Tackling new ways to bring publicity and education to the public via new technology, spearheaded by Deb Pascoe, with strong support by Anne Wood and Susan Skomma, was groundbreaking.



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The further development of a speaker's bureau of Master Gardeners willing to go out into the public to share the knowledge provided by the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, is stronger than ever.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without a team effort from all the other hard-working Master Gardens and Interns willing to give their time and sweat to make all these projects successful. I am not going to be able to list all the names of these people but know that you were noticed, and your efforts were greatly appreciated.

I learned other things about myself this past year too, regarding gardening. I was doing too much. We have a 50' X 50' flower garden for our Airbnb guests and a 20' X 50' perennial garden next to our home. We then added more flowers next to our two cabins. Due to the very harsh hot summer without rain, it was hard to get motivated to go out into the heat to pull the weeds that were growing like crazy. So, we decided to cut back on the flower gardening next year. We also use to have a 50' X 50' vegetable garden (it is now the flower garden) but we were growing way more than we could eat and the work was exhausting. When I discovered how to grow greens indoors on a 2' X 4' rack that provided all our needs, we were very happy. Hence forth, we will be keeping any future outdoor vegetable gardens to 4' X 12' raised beds with provisions to provide partial shade as it gets hotter.



Karen and I decided that it is not the right time to move to Kentucky after all. Perhaps it will happen in the future, who knows? Next year I will fulfill my role as a Past President on the Board, but I will focus most of my time on being President of the Athens Rotary Club.

The thoughts I want to leave with you is not to be afraid to assume the positions of being officers in the Association. Our members who have been Master Gardeners for a long time want to be able to step away from being officers year after year. They are tired. A club will only survive if newer members agree to step up to leadership roles. As I have mentioned earlier, you will not be doing the work alone nor without support. After all, I managed to make it through the year!

## HCMGA Projects



- **Children's Progaming:** HCMGA is available for consultation on school or teaching gardens.
- **Greenhouse:** The HCMGA maintains a greenhouse located at Trinity Valley Community College. This greenhouse allows us to propagate and grow plants that are sold at our annual spring plant sale.
- **Harvest Garden:** The HCMGA's newest project, the Harvest Garden, is a teaching garden on growing fruits and vegetables with hands-on demonstrations. It is located inside the Regional Fairpark Complex.
- **Plant Sale:** The HCMGA hosts an annual plant sale in the spring which is open to the public. Master Gardeners propagate and grow different varieties of plants and trees. This event is a major fundraiser for the organization.
- **Summer Series:** Workshops are provided in the summer months to share expertise and educate the public on various gardening topics.

# An Easy Fix for Winter Foliage

Lydia Holley, Master Gardener



Because the ground was so warm, the light freeze we received a few days ago did no damage to my landscape. Tropical plants did not even go dormant for the winter. Most are still blooming.

However, we will receive freezes this winter and it is important that gardeners not stay huddled in their warm houses but go outside and evaluate their landscapes. Many novice gardeners pay attention only to bloom, so when those plants go dormant in the winter, there is nothing left on top of the soil to look at. That happened to me when I first started gardening, and it has happened to many other gardeners whether they will admit it or not.

As gardeners learn to look past summer flowers and think about their landscapes in winter, they tend to believe that only blooms are still important. There are several plants which will bloom in winter in East Texas. However, do not overlook the importance of foliage. Looking out at a green landscape will make the garden not only look better in winter but will soothe the gardener's scratching desire to renovate their entire landscape.

If you find that you have a spot which is barer in winter than you would like, do not panic. You might not need to rip everything out and start over. Consider just planting some bulbs which are dormant in summer but have foliage in winter. That way, even if your entire garden filled with summer-blooming plants goes dormant, you can still have something green to look at in winter and your summer garden will be just as beautiful.

Spider lily (*Lycoris*) blooms on stalks in fall but soon thereafter, new foliage emerges which stays green all winter. It is the perfect bulb to plant in a bed which may have too many winter-dormant plants. Grape hyacinth (*Muscari*) is another bulb which goes dormant in summer but puts out leaves in winter. It blooms in the early spring. A couple of bulbs which may not be as reliable as those first two, but which have the same qualities of being green in winter and dormant in summer are hardy cyclamen (*Cyclamen coum*) and dimpled trout lily (*Erythronium umbilicatum*).

On a chilly winter day, you will be able to look out at your garden and see the pleasing color of green. And even if every plant in your garden bed goes dormant, you will not have to change your design. Just add summer-dormant bulbs for winter foliage.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com), or visit [txmq.org/hendersonmq](http://txmq.org/hendersonmq).





# Keyhole Gardening: A 2022 Intern Project

## The Harvest Garden's Newest Garden



Annalisa Alexander, Master Gardener Intern



Intern Team who put on this event beam at their finished Keyhole Garden!

Saturday, October 15, this year's intern class gave a presentation on making a keyhole garden. The event was held at the Henderson County Master Gardener Association's demonstration garden, the **Harvest Garden**, located on the grounds of the **Henderson County Regional Fair Park**.

Prior to the event, our Intern class constructed the outside of the structure. As attendees arrived at the presentation, we gave them a handout detailing the basic information for a keyhole garden, what we did to construct the outside form of our keyhole garden, and all of the supplies used. *(See the handout below)*

The event was very well attended. 42 people came to learn about keyhole gardens, including 2 master gardeners from Kaufman County.



Layering and Stomping

Master Gardener Cindy Beck gave an interesting talk on her experience building and maintaining her own keyhole garden. Intern Cathy Reagan explained what we had done previously, and what we planned to demonstrate during the event.

The materials we provided for the activity were soil, manure, cardboard (that we had soaking in water), fabric, shredded paper, green yard trimmings, ash, and scraps for the compost basket. We invited the audience to help fill the keyhole bed, layer by layer. Each layer was stomped down and continually sprayed with water.





The garden was filled to a volcano shape, till it was about 6 inches above the garden wall, so the water would flow to all points with the nutrients from the compost basket.



It is very important to put in the plants as soon as you fill your keyhole garden, spacing them tightly, with seeds planted in between. This helps protect moisture and minimizes weeds. By the time we were done the garden was planted with basil, walking onions from our green house, cauliflower, collard greens, broccoli, cabbage, kale, lettuce plants and lettuce seeds.

Deb Tolman's book, Soiled Rotten, [debtolman.com](http://debtolman.com), and conversations with Deb Toman herself were our resources.



*The following content is the handout given to participants at the event. We hope the pictures that describe our process on building the exterior of the Keyhole Garden show just how easy it is for you to make your own.*

## OUR KEYHOLE GARDEN (Intern Project)



### MATERIALS:

### QUANTITY:

Cinder blocks (8x8x16)	53
Caps for cinder blocks	18
Paint for cinder blocks	3 gallons
Tubes of glue	2 tubes
Soil from <b>Splawns</b>	1 yard
Crushed Granite	3 bags
Manure	Donated
Mulch pine bark	10 bags
Disposable gloves	1 box
Hardware cloth	Donated





Irrigation  
 T-Post  
 String, level, glue gun  
 Wire cutter  
 Hoe, Shovel, paint brushes  
 Rags  
 Paint spray marker  
 Paint sprayer  
 Water Trough to soak cardboard  
 Seeds, materials to grow plants



Donated by Harvest Garden  
 1 Donated  
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**Process:**

Find level ground to build the garden.

Measure out 6 feet in diameter. Deb Tolman is the authority we used to decide how to create our Keyhole Garden and she advocates round Keyhole gardens because the round shape distributes water and nutrients more efficiently.



Put down hardware cloth.



Lay crushed granite to level the cinder







**Placing and leveling blocks:** If your base is level, you are able to just stack the next rows of blocks and have your Keyhole Garden be level. It takes a little time to be precise with the first level but it will be worth the trouble for the rest of the rows of blocks.



And check again.



Putting down weed cloth...  
We will top it with mulch, later.



Second row.





Third row.



Caps for cinder blocks are being glued down. The white pipe in the foreground is our irrigation line that the Harvest Garden tied into their irrigation system for us.



During this demonstration, we will finish our Keyhole Garden by filling it, making our composting basket and planting our plants. We will need to fill it in a volcano shape, taller in the center so the water and nutrients flow more efficiently. We are layering browns and greens in a 3:1 ratio, separated by layers of soaked cardboard.

The benefit of using cardboard with your soil instead of soil only is:

1. It creates a good balance of microbiology for plants.
2. Uses less water because it holds water 10X better than soil, making keyhole gardens excellent for drought areas.
3. Cardboard is carbon.
4. No weeds nor insects.
5. Gives us an interactive presentation as we soak cardboard and step on it to compact it inside the keyhole garden.

We used Deb Tolman's book, ***Soiled Rotten:Keyhole Gardens***, and the companion DVD as our resource for building our keyhole garden. A great place to start to find answers as you start planning your keyhole garden is: [www.debtolman.com](http://www.debtolman.com).



# Henderson County Master Gardener Association

## ~~ Members Page ~~

**Member and Intern Requirements:** Members need 12 hours of **volunteer service**, 6 hours of **continuing education**, and attendance at 5 **meetings**. Interns need 50 hours of **volunteer service**.



**Greenhouse:** Starting September 12<sup>th</sup>, Members are welcome to volunteer on Mondays from 9am – 11am.

**Harvest Garden:** Members are welcome to volunteer on Tuesdays 9- 11am.

**Inside Dirt:** Member volunteers are welcome to contribute and send articles, pictures, cartoons, gardening games, kid resources and upcoming events to Susan Skommesa at [susanloves1life@gmail.com](mailto:susanloves1life@gmail.com).



*Master Gardeners,  
remember to record  
your hours.*



### 2022 HCMGA Meetings

- ✓ 10:00 am 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month
- ✓ **Location:** St. Edwards Catholic Church 1310 S. Palestine Athens TX 75751

♣ November 16<sup>th</sup>

♣ December 21<sup>st</sup>



HCMGA has projects that need **you!**

One of our projects will fit your

- Schedule
- Energy level
- Mobility

Talk to someone to explore a good fit for you!

# November & December Gardening Tips

By Susan Skommesa, Master Gardener

## In General:

No need to wonder when the first frost date will be. Bam - it already hit! A frost this early reminds me to enjoy any fall color I can find, as it will probably pass fast. Once the trees have lost their leaves, a different beauty emerges, and we can evaluate our landscape for changes. What do we look for? Check out the trees for shape, winter gardens for bareness, lawns for gopher and water damage, and shrubbery for overall impact.



## Veggies and Herbs



Cool season vegetables love this weather. Just keep the frost off them using frost blankets or domes of plastic. Don't forget to water your cool season veggies such as lettuce, cabbage, spinach, broccoli, brussel sprouts and leeks. Well watered plants have a much better chance surviving freezing temperatures. Many cool weather veggies taste better after a freeze, as they sweeten up. Keep in mind though, that growth and ripening slows down as the temperature drops.

Garden supply stores and online sources offer frost blankets that lay over your rows or beds. However, protecting your hard work doesn't have to be expensive. Pictured is an inexpensive example of keeping the frost off your veggies. The frame of this cover was made with PVC, to which a couple of \$4.00 clear shower curtains are clamped. The clips that clamp over the plastic and PVC were bought through an online garden center.



## How about Flowers



My Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) certainly prefers this cool fall weather over the scorching heat of summer. Likewise, my Oxblood Lilies (*Rhodophiala bifida*), rosebushes, and Mystic Spires Salvia (*Salvia balsalmispim*) are enjoying the cool weather.



November and December offer perfect weather to finish planting spring bulbs like Daffodil, Crocus, Dutch Iris, Hyacinth, and Narcissus. Bulbs are such a big part of spring, but with planning, you can have an almost year-round display of flowers. Many bulbs return year-after-year and multiply on their own. Digging up the divisions gives you bulbs to transplant into other gardens. When purchasing or dividing to transplant, the bulbs should be firm, not mushy. Some varieties need to be divided every few years to prevent overcrowding.

And speaking of bulbs, don't forget to plant garlic cloves. Forgive my diversion back into vegetables, but a large clove or 2 can produce as much as 100 garlic plants. In the spring, when the greenery dies back, pull them up keeping the dried leaves on the

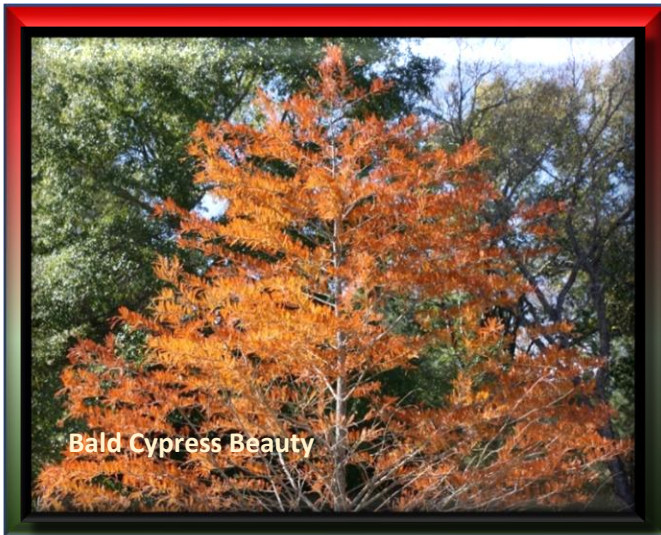




bulb. Lay them out to dry and then braid their leaves together in bunches. Hang them under the porch roof and cut a way a garlic as needed for cooking. In my experience, the garlic will stay good for about 8-9 months. When the garlics look like they will fade, store the remaining garlic. I can be stored in the fridge as cloves or chopped, or they can be chopped and dehydrated, to store in your cabinet.

Getting back to flowers though, enjoy the blooms of Camellias and consider adding more to your landscape. Check your favorite nursery for a supply of colorful Mums to adorn your patio or add to your garden. Plant cool-season annual color directly into the soil as you buy them, including Daffodils, Flowering Cabbage, Flowering Kale, Grape Hyacinths, Jonquils, Narcissus, Pansies, Pinks, and Snapdragons.

## Trees and Shrubs



Shrubs provide greenery year-round. Many offer flowers in the spring and berries in the fall. They make the perfect backdrop for flowers, offer privacy, and help define yard-space. The right trees offer spectacular color during the fall. In the picture, notice the backdrop of greenery offsetting the blazing color of the Cypress.

Now is a good time to plant or transplant trees and shrubs. When adding shrubs to your landscape, choose carefully, keeping in mind their height and width when fully-grown. Newly planted or transplanted shrubs and trees need more water during the winter than do those that are well established.

This is also the perfect time to prune and shape trees and shrubs. Before pruning, look at the tree or shrub in the

context of its surroundings. Notice any branches that overhang structures or provide more shade than you want. Think about shape. I tend to like my shrub shapes to take on a natural or draped look. Others may enjoy the manicured round, cone, spiral, or flat-top look for their shrubbery. It all depends on personal taste and desired effect. A good rule of thumb when pruning trees and shrubs is to prune away suckers, as well as branches that grow downward. However, keep branches that grow upward. When your trees are bare of leaves, look at each tree individually from different angles. Notice branches that make the tree appear lopsided or out of balance. Trim these away with a solid clean cut.



## Lawns

This may sound silly, but after you've cleaned up your lawn mower, replaced the blades, and stored it away, winter is actually a great time to plan your lawn care for next season. Pull out next year's calendar and schedule in when you will repair, seed and fertilize your lawn. Spring gets busy fast.

The months of April and May are a good time to seed a new lawn, repair any low places, or mend holes and messes made by gophers, pigs, dogs, and other beast that dare to fight you for that plush green carpet. In general, the first time you fertilize is in June. By then you should have been able to mow that new spring grass at least three times. Remember to fertilize just before it rains, or give your lawn a good watering afterwards. Plan to fertilize every six weeks until September.



# Planting Annual Cereal Rye in Your Vegetable Garden Now, Prevents Next Season's Weeds!



By Susan Skommesa, Henderson County Master Gardener



What if you could eliminate the spring time weeding task needed to get your beds ready for planting, and use a method that improves the soil over the winter? After reading a great article on *Old World Garden Farm's* website about planting the cover crop cereal rye, it occurred to me that this is valuable information for the backyard gardener. Farmers use cover crops on a large scale because cover crops rapidly and intensely stimulate the biological activity of the soil during their growth, especially after decomposition. With this in mind, best natural practices can be used on any scale.

Planting a fall cover crop has far reaching value: from keeping weeds at bay during the winter, to adding nutrients back into the soil, to preventing soil erosion and mineral leaching during our heavy rainfall season.

There are a lot of great cover crops to choose from. See the below tables from the *Texas A&M* website. Click on the link to read more on cover crops in general. The article I read from *Old World Garden Farm's* website made a case for cereal rye, which is also listed on *Texas A&M's* recommendation list. *Old World Garden Farm's* reasoning was so compelling, that I thought it worth bringing to your attention. They prefer cereal rye not only because of its nutrient value to the soil, but because it is easy to plant, maintain, does not need to be tilled-under come spring, and keeps weeds away.

**Translation backyard gardener:** Using annual rye now, just about eliminates next year's weeds! (So they say, and so worth a try. Of course, my 5 lb. bag just arrived in the mail.)

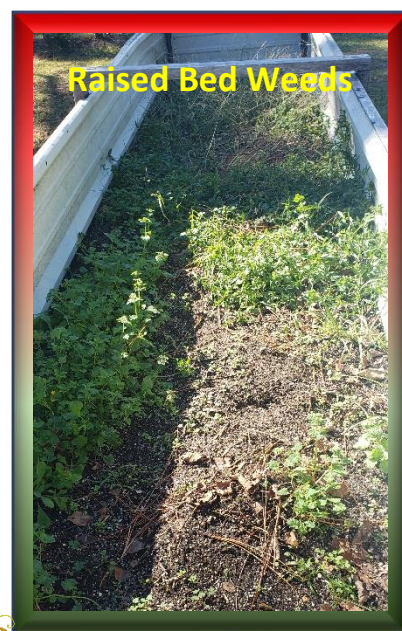
**Why... How... You ask?**



Rye has an ultra-thick root system that grows deep into the soil; even into clay and heavily compacted soils. As the roots grow, **they break up hard clay soil with ease**. When needing to fix clay soil, seeding annual cereal rye in late fall may be a great tool in the toolbox.

As vegetable growers, we know that nitrogen is a major player. Rye's roots contain tiny nodules that add nitrogen to the soil. Rye loosens the soil and adds nitrogen! Win-win! In addition, the decomposition of the cover crop in the spring increases soil cation (*positively charged ions*) exchange capacity. Therefore, the ability of the soil to hold and exchange nutrients increases, allowing the nutrients to be taken up by vegetables in an assimilable form.

Cereal rye is an annual with large seeds that sprouts quickly; approximately 7 days.





## Come Spring...



This is where the value of rye continues to multiply outward. Not only does rye loosen soil and add nitrogen. Rye nullifies the gardener's greatest nemesis come spring! Annual cereal rye can greatly reduce your garden's **weeds** because it creates a thick barrier of living vegetation as it grows. One that snuffs out existing weeds, and keeps new weed seeds from ever finding a home in bare soil.

As the cover crop dies back in the spring, all of the clippings, roots and stems break down into the soil. What is left behind are tiny channels now overflowing with rich humus. These channels are vital in allowing air, water and nutrients find their way through the soil, to your vegetable plants. All of which leads to healthier, stronger crops, year after year.

No tilling, no weeds! Can't wait to try this in my raised beds!



## Here's what to do...

As vegetable plants fade in mid to late fall, clear the garden rows or raised beds of plant matter. With a tine rake slightly scratch the soil surface. Spread **annual cereal rye** seeds on the row or bed as if planting grass seed. Then gently rake the soil to help set the seed a bit. There is no need at this point to fully cover the seeds with soil, just lightly rake it over. lastly, cover the seed with a light ½" covering of straw or fallen leaves (chopped) to keep the birds away.

Within 7 days, the rye starts to poke its bright green blades through the surface. Within a few weeks, the raised bed or rows are completely covered in a thick mass of bright green turf.

As the weather turns cold, the rye goes dormant. When spring returns, the rye starts to grow again. As it grows, cut it back or mow every week or two. Either leave the clippings to mulch into the bed, or bag them to compost. After a few mowings, the rye begins to die off. Plant right into this, without tilling. There are no weeds to spend time removing. Most importantly, the soil has been re-energized by the cereal rye.

Annual rye can go by many names, including winter rye and cereal rye. Annual rye is a cereal grain, not a grass. It is not to be confused with perennial or annual rye grass. The seed of annual rye is much larger than that of rye grass. This is why I've continued throughout this article to stress Cereal Rye. It's important to make sure you are buying the right seed if you want a no-till cover crop.



### Resources:

- <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vitwine/2018/09/17/cover-crops-for-vineyard-floor-management/>
- <https://oldworldgardenfarms.com/2020/09/10/plant-annual-rye-cover-crop/>

## Winter Annual

Name	Family	Characteristics	Seeding Rate (lb/ac)
Annual grasses (wheat, barley, oats, annual ryegrass, cereal rye, triticale)	Grass	Cold-tolerant, high lime tolerance, low drought and generally low salinity tolerance, moderate moisture use	Wheat, barley, oats, triticale: 60-120 Annual ryegrass: 15-30
Austrian winter pea	Legume	Moderately cold and drought tolerant, moisture efficient	60-80
Brassicas (mustards, turnips, forage radish)		Tap-rooted, moderate to high drought tolerance	Mustard: 5-12 Turnip: 4-7 Radish: 8-12
Hairy vetch	Legume	Cold tolerant, moderate tolerance to drought and soil lime; low salinity tolerance	15-20

## Summer Annual



Name	Family	Characteristics	Seeding Rate (lb/ac)
Buckwheat	Grass	Cold sensitive, moderate drought tolerance	50-60, drilled
Cowpea	Legume	Drought tolerant	50-100
Foxtail millet	Grass	Cold sensitive, drought tolerant	15-20
Lablab	Legume	Vining and spreading legume	50-60
Pearl millet	Grass	Cold sensitive, drought tolerant	15-20
Sesbania	Legume	Fast and vigorous growth	30-40
Sorghum-Sundangrass	Grass	Cold sensitive, drought tolerant	15-40



Source: Texas A&M: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vitwine/2018/09/17/cover-crops-for-vineyard-floor-management/>



### Did you know?

The HCMGA Website has a lot of good information. We have **articles** on a variety of gardening topics and events our organization hosts. This newsletter (*Inside Dirt*) is but an appetizer for the depth and breadth of **topics, pictures, Plant Library and great practical information** you will find in that treasure trove, which gets added to every week by member writers. <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/welcome/our-impact/publicity/>

### Please Share with Us!

There is so much creativity amongst our readers, that I'd like to invite you to share your projects, ideas, clever quotes, humor, pictures or the interesting and beautiful things happening in your gardens or landscaping. You can send a blurb, a quote, an article or contact me to interview you. Photos are always worth a thousand words. Send submissions to the editor, Susan Skommesa, at [susanloves1life@gmail.com](mailto:susanloves1life@gmail.com).





# Connect with Us:



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