

Inside Dirt



A Note from our President

By Susan Skommesa

As 2023 rolls into 2024 and celebrations wind down, you may need to recharge. As a gardener, what better way to recharge than watching things grow and bloom. This time of year, stay out of the cold while enjoying house plants and seed-starting. Find a warm spot in the house with enough natural light (or grow-lights), and give your spring garden a head start. Tomato and pepper plants are slow growers that'll be ready for transplanting mid-March. Seed-start the leafy green and cruciferous veggies for planting in February: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, brussels sprouts, kale, lettuce, spinach... Keep a frost blanket ready, or create a mini-greenhouse with PVC and 6mil. plastic over your beds.



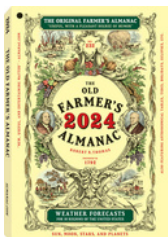
The HCMGA Gardening Guide has many more details for seed starting vegetables and flowers. Also, watch our website, our Facebook page, and your email for the date of our upcoming class on Starting Your Spring Garden.

Happy 2024 Gardening!

Find us online! <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/HCMastergardener>

2024 Texas Weather Predictions



Although Texas experienced a comparably uneventful winter between 2022 and 2023, the Farmers' Almanac - which predicted winter storm Uri (affectionately known as "Snowmagedden" around here) with partial accuracy - is again advising Texans to prepare for the worst. The forecast is predicated on a looming "super" El Niño, a weather pattern of unusually high water temperature off the west coast of South America that brings heavy rains across the Americas.

The Almanac calls for "unseasonably cold and stormy" weather in Texas this winter. Their report includes a few regular winter storms until early April 2024 but warns of a potential significant snow and ice storm in mid-January.

- Winter will be colder than normal north and warmer south. It will be coldest in early and late December, early and late January, and mid-February.
- Precipitation and snow will be above normal. Best snow chances (north) will occur in late December and late January.
- April and May will be cool north and warm south, with more rain than usual.
- Summer will be cooler than normal north, hotter south, and hottest in late June, late July, and mid-August. Rainfall will be above normal, with tropical storms possible in mid-July and late August.
- September and October will be warmer than normal, with less rain than normal north and more south. And, expect a tropical storm in mid-September.

Upcoming Events

Regular Meeting 1/17/24 @ 11am

Regular Meeting 2/21/24 @ 11am

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Gardening Hints for January & February:

January is “getting ready” time for a rewarding spring — not only for dreaming and planning for spring, but for actually planting and preparing plants for a new year and a new season. The fickle days of February bring sunshine and frost. It’s nearing time for spring... Not only for dreaming and planning, but for actually planting and preparing for a new season.

- Plant and transplant trees and shrubs.
- Winter Pruning.
- Cultivate vegetable beds.
- Provide winter protection for tender plants.
- Plant fruit and nut trees.
- Plant bare-root plants and roses.
- Get ready for the early “cool season” vegetables.
- Protect tender outdoor plants from winter cold.
- Supply supplemental moisture to help prevent freeze damage.
- Clean and prepare garden beds.
- Rake and de-thatch lawns.
- Provide food, water, and winter shelter for garden birds.
- Remember: plan before planting. Choose new plantings with a purpose and plan in mind. Choose the best plant to satisfy a given landscape need. Know the plant you choose – its demands, its character and ultimate size and plan accordingly.



For a complete list of Fall Gardening Tips, [click here to view our monthly Gardening Guide.](#)

Landscapes: What's Trending in Texas for 2024



- Native Plants: Choose from a wide variety of native plants and trees that thrive in the Texas climate, reducing the need for excessive watering and maintenance. Combine natives with xeriscaping techniques to conserve water and support local ecosystems.
- Pollinator Plants: Expect to see an interest in essential pollinators like bees and butterflies come 2024. According to Garden Media, these insects have even become popular interior décor motifs, such as on pillows, rugs, lamps, and wallpaper. “The growing intrigue and awareness of insects helps boost an interest in the plants that feed them,” says Shubber Ali, CEO of Garden for Wildlife. Experiment with this trend by growing pollinator plants, like bee balm, asters, and goldenrod.
- Edible Landscapes: The trend of growing edible plants in the landscape is expected to continue in 2024. This trend is perfect for those who want to grow their own food yet don’t have the space for a traditional vegetable garden plot. Consider planting fruit trees, berry bushes, and herbs in your landscape.
- Container Gardening: As more people begin living in urban areas, container gardening has become more popular than ever. In fact, the report states that there was a 200 percent increase in households that engaged in container gardening last year. One way this trend can be applied to your own garden is by maximizing vertical space with hanging and trailing plants.
- Low-Maintenance Landscapes: Finally, low-maintenance landscapes are expected to become more popular in 2024. New technology-driven features like app-controlled irrigation and lighting are reducing common effort in the garden.
- Sustainable Gardens: According to the report, concern for the environment defined almost every exhibit at the 2023 Chelsea Flower Show, and many exhibits were focused on sustainable and efficient community gardens. An interest in sustainability efforts is expected to yield less curated gardens that are filled with native and carbon capturing plants in 2024.



What's new at the Harvest Garden?

Hey MG John Maloch! What's happening at the Harvest Garden?

- We have successfully planted garlic and onions. And the Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, beets, kale, lettuce, and collards are thriving and ready for harvest.
- We created a permanent asparagus bed; and we'll be planting asparagus on January 9th.

Asparagus

EHT-151
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Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) is a highly desirable, early-spring vegetable. Keep in mind, asparagus will not produce well in areas with mild winters and hot summers. While it takes 2 to 3 years for the crown to reach full production, with proper care and a suitable climate, an asparagus crown can last 15 to 25 years.

🌱 Grow it

Varieties

- 'Martha Washington,' 'UC 157,' or 'Jersey Giant'

Soil Preparation


- In late fall, spread a 3-inch layer of organic matter over the beds. Till or spade them to a depth of 10 to 12 inches, and turn the soil to cover all organic matter.
- Incorporate ½ cup of 15-5-10 per 20 feet of row.

Planting

- Buy healthy, vigorous, 1- or 2-year-old crowns from a nursery, garden center, or seed catalog.
- Plant crowns in January or February.
- Mark rows 5 feet apart. Dig each furrow 4 inches wide and 4 to 6 inches deep in heavy soil or 6 to 12 inches deep in loose soil.
- Place the crowns 12 to 14 inches apart in each furrow.
- Fill in the furrows with soil to their original level, careful not to compact the soil.

Fertilizing

- For established beds, scatter 4 cups of 15-5-10 fertilizer per 20 feet of row before growth begins in late January or early February. Always water the fertilizer into the soil.
- After the last harvest in April or May, apply an additional 2 cups of 21-0-0 fertilizer per 20 feet of row.



Care During the Season


- Water the beds thoroughly, and allow the top 1 inch of soil to dry before watering again.
- Keep weeds pulled or hoed from the beds. To suppress weeds, spread a 4- to 6-inch-thick layer of organic mulch over the rows.
- After the first hard frost or freeze, cut off the fern tops at ground level and mulch the bed. In southern areas, the fern may not be killed by a freeze, so it should be removed in late November when the ferns turn yellow.


Insects & Diseases


- If something does not look right with your plant, contact your county Extension agent for more information.


Harvesting


- Do not harvest during the first 2 years after planting to allow the underground crown to grow.
- Asparagus spears from established beds should be harvested between late February and early May.
- Harvest the spears when they are 4 to 10 inches long by snapping them off by hand at ground level.
- To prevent the spears from becoming fibrous, harvest at least every other day.
- Spears with loose or opened heads are too mature.
- Stop harvesting when the spear diameter becomes less than ½ inch.




 full sun

 deep, well-drained soil

continued 



For more information on vegetables, visit aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/
Additional recipe information can be found at dinnertotnight.tamu.edu/
Texas A&M Agrilife Extension is an equal opportunity employer and program provider.



Paperwhites - Bring a Touch of Spring Indoors

I really enjoy fragrant Paperwhites blooming inside over the winter months as a tempting harbinger of springtime. Because the bulbs typically take four to six weeks to bloom, you'll need to time the planting for blooms to appear when you want them. If you start them now, they should be blooming by Valentine's Day!

Here's what you'll need: a shallow container without drain holes; stones, marbles, or gravel; 3 (or an odd number that fits your container) Paperwhite bulbs.

Select a container that's about 3 to 4 inches deep and does not have drainage holes. Spread 1 to 2 inches of stones, marbles, or gravel along the bottom of the container. Whatever material you choose, it should be clean and preferably brand new. Position the Paperwhite bulbs with the pointed end up on top of the stone layer. Add another layer of stones to fill in any gaps and nearly cover the bulbs. The pointed tip of the bulbs should still be showing. Tight spacing is fine. Paperwhites look better in a group, and the tight fit will provide support and help keep them from toppling over.

(Continued on next page)

Paperwhites - Bring a Touch of Spring Indoors (continued)



Add water to the container so the level just reaches the base of the bulbs. Allowing the bottom of the bulb to sit in water will stimulate root growth, but don't cover the entire bulb with water as it may rot. Keep the bulbs on the cool side at around 65 degrees.

Check your bulbs daily to maintain the water level (just touching the base of the bulb). When you see roots developing, it is time to move the container to a sunny window. The sunnier the better, but don't permit the growing bulbs to get too warm or they will stretch and become leggy. Most windows are cool during winter, so don't be afraid to place the pot close to the windowpane.

Paperwhites will bloom for a week or two before fading. Once the flowers appear, the blooms will last longer if you move the pot out of direct sunlight to a cool spot with indirect or diffused light. For continuous blooms, plant pots every two weeks in the late fall and early winter.

Chicken Marsala - A Family Favorite

Ingredients:

1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts (sliced thin or tenderized to ¼-½" thick)
 ¼ cup PLUS 1 Tbsp all-purpose flour, divided
 4 Tbsp butter, margarine or olive oil
 1 small onion, finely chopped (about ½ cup)
 1 pkg. sliced mushrooms
 ⅓ cup dry marsala wine or chicken broth
 1 cup chicken broth
 1 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley

Directions:

- Season chicken with salt and pepper, if desired.
- Dip chicken in ¼ cup flour until evenly coated.
- Melt 2 Tbsp butter/margarine in 12" skillet over medium-high heat.
- Cook chicken, turning once, 10 minutes or until chicken is thoroughly cooked.
- Remove to serving platter and keep warm.
- Melt remaining 2 Tbsp butter/margarine in skillet over medium heat and cook onions and mushrooms; stirring occasionally, 3 minutes or until vegetables are tender.
- Sprinkle with remaining 1 Tbsp flour and cook, stirring constantly, 1 minute.
- Stir in wine and cook 1 minute, scraping brown bits from bottom of skillet.
- Add 1-cup chicken broth and bring to boil over high heat.
- Cook 2 minutes stirring frequently until sauce is thickened.
- Return cooked chicken to pan then spoon sauce over chicken breasts.
- Sauté for 1-2 minutes to heat chicken thoroughly.

Serve over noodles or rice. Makes 4 servings.



Bon Appétit!

About Henderson County Master Gardeners Association

Our Mission is to educate the community about a broad range of gardening topics.

- Find us online: <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/>
- Find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HCmastergardener>
- Interested in becoming a Master Gardener? <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/about-us/>
- [Click here](#) to be added to our email distribution list.

Do We Really Need Cold Weather?

YES! Cold weather plays a crucial role in the natural processes and ecological balance of East Texas. Cold weather is essential for the region for several reasons:

1. **Ecological Balance** - Cold weather helps regulate insect populations by providing a natural control mechanism.
2. **Natural Dormancy for Plants** - Many plants, especially deciduous trees, go through a period of dormancy during the winter. The cold temperatures signal to the plants that it's time to conserve energy and enter a resting state. This dormancy period is essential for the overall health and life cycle of plants.
3. **Chilling Requirement for Fruit Trees** - Fruit trees have chilling requirements. They need a certain number of cold hours during winter to break dormancy and set fruit properly. Without sufficient chilling hours, these trees may not produce fruits as effectively.
4. **Weed and Invasive Species Control** - Cold weather can help control the spread of invasive plant species and weeds. Some non-native plants may be less cold-resistant, and periodic cold spells can help prevent them from dominating local ecosystems.
5. **Groundwater Recharge** - Cold weather, especially in the form of snow, contributes to the replenishment of groundwater.
6. **Wildlife Adaptation** - Many wildlife species in East Texas are adapted to seasonal changes, including cold weather. Some animals hibernate or become inactive during the winter, conserving energy when food resources may be limited.
7. **Fire Management** - Cold weather helps reduce the risk of wildfires by creating a moist environment and slowing the drying of vegetation.
8. **Agricultural Benefits** - Certain crops, including winter wheat and certain cover crops, benefit from exposure to cold temperatures. Cold weather can also help break pest cycles, reducing the prevalence of certain agricultural pests and diseases.

Cold weather supports biodiversity, helps manage pests, and contributes to the overall resilience of the region's natural systems.

ICYMI (In Case You Missed It):

- [Master Gardeners Receive Awards – December 25, 2023](#)
- [Add A Favorite Tree to Your Landscape – December 18, 2023](#)
- [Make Your Garden Better Next Year – December 11, 2023](#)
- [Gifts for Gardeners – December 4, 2023](#)
- [Johnny Jump Up: A Little Bloom with a Big Impact – November 27, 2023](#)

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