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EnviroSmart

ROCKWALL COUNTY EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER

FALL 2023 SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER

CLASSES

Check our [website](#) for the latest classes and tickets including our upcoming classes: **All About Trees** and a free kids program at the library.

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

Every Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. Call (972) 204-7660 or email us anytime at: rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu

SURVEY

Please take our short [survey](#) to help improve our educational outreach.

How does your garden grow?

Send us your pictures!

We know Rockwall County has a lot of plant lovers and we want to see what you are growing. Pictures will be featured here in upcoming issues of the EnviroSmart. Please send photos to rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu. [Official rules.](#)

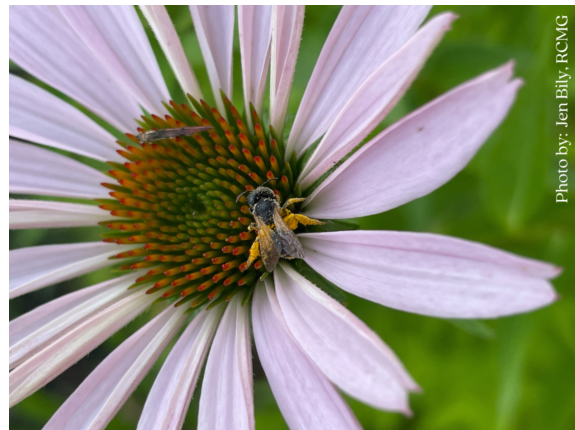


Photo by: Jen Bily, RCMG

Fall Plant Sale!

Coming soon! Check our website and FB for upcoming details on our Fall Plant Sale. The catalogue will be emailed September 26th to our EnviroSmart subscribers. This fall we are excited to offer a Texas native seed mix and multiple choices of native milkweed seeds. Get a jump on perennials by planting in fall for a great spring show. We will also offer winter annual favorites.



Featured Texas Superstar®

New Gold Lantana

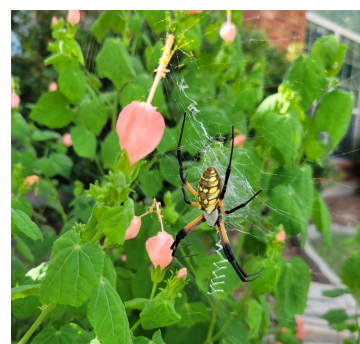
Lantana x hybrida 'New Gold'

Texas Superstar plants make the list for promotion of outstanding plants after they have proven field trial performance in most regions of Texas. New Gold lantana was developed in the 1980s and is one of the most popular and commonly available perennial Texas Superstar plants. It is a drought and deer tolerant plant that can also withstand the Texas heat and, was the first lantana developed that does not grow berries (berries inhibit blooming). Take a look at this New Gold lantana grown at the Rockwall Extension Office that is never watered, even when it is grown in a heat zone (metal building and sidewalk) during the heat of summer.

Todd's Timely Tidbits

Rockwall County Extension Agent Todd Williams

1. If you find an orb weaver in your garden, make a new friend. She will help take care of your garden pests.
2. The first day of fall is the last part of September. The weather should cool down by December.
3. Watch for the migratory butterflies and hummingbirds and be a dear by providing snacks in your garden for their journey; just keep the red dye for your Kool-Aid.
4. I found that my rock garden looks great even without watering. Consider a rock break or rock garden to add more textural interest to your landscape.
5. It is true that fall is one of the best times for planting. Nothing replaces having a plan before planting. I have found that hand drawn plans and/or scribbles work best for me and are easiest to change.
6. An Extension Master Gardener once reminded me that brown is a color. We all might need to remember that as we think about our landscapes after this summer.
7. More water does not mean more growth. In fact, it could mean boiling our plants in the heat if they are potentially sitting in a bowl that we created when we dug that "perfect" hole for planting.
8. Xeriscape, though an "old" term, does not mean ZEROscape. Think of Texas SmartScapes using zone plantings with [Earth-Kind®](#) strategies.



Composting

Building from the Bottom Up

In our last two newsletters we presented the benefits of composting and recommendations for compost sites, structures, and equipment. This article will outline a recommended “recipe” with directions for your aerobic composting project.

What are the recommended ingredients for efficient aerobic composting?

- **Carbon** – dead leaves, brush trimmings, woody plant material, hay, straw
- **Nitrogen** – green leaves, grass clippings, fruit/vegetable scraps, bone meal, blood meal, cow or horse manure, ammonium nitrate
- **Oxygen** – obtained through turning the pile
- **Water** – just enough to keep the pile moist
- **Microbes** – from plant material, manure or soil
- **Temperature** – 135 -170°F
- **Time** - 6 weeks to 3 months dependent upon mix of ingredients and turning frequency

How do I actually build a compost pile?

When starting a compost pile you literally **start at the bottom** and build your way up, one layer at a time. Layering helps keep the various ingredients in correct proportions. The bottom of the pile should be made of a single layer of brushwood or tree branches. Drain tiles or air-bricks may be used at the bottom of the pile for drainage. The second layer, 6-10 inches thick, should be carbon ingredients, such as brown leaves, woody chips, hay or straw. The next layer, 2-3 inches thick, should be high in nitrogen from green grass clippings, green leaves, fruit and vegetable scraps. More concentrated nitrogen should be added in the form of horse or cow manure an inch thick. Bone or blood meal or ammonium nitrate can be added for a concentrated nitrogen source if manure is not used. If adding bone/blood meal or ammonium nitrate, use 1/3 cup for every 25 square feet of compost. A thin layer of soil can then be added for additional microbes. Mix the layers after adding each additional layer. Add moisture after each layer to keep the compost slightly moist, not soggy. [Earth-Kind® composting](#).

What are “best practices” to achieve efficient aerobic composting?

- Have adequate mass. The compost pile should be no less than 3 square feet.
- Maintain adequate oxygen levels by turning the pile at least weekly.
- When turning the pile move contents from the outside of the pile to the inside.
- Maintain temperature of 135-170°F.
- Maintain carbon to nitrogen ratio of 25-30:1 (by weight).
- The compost should feel like a damp sponge which, when squeezed, yields only 1-2 drops of water (moisture content of 40%-70%).

What are some helpful hints for a beginning composter?

- The more frequently the pile is turned, the faster the compost will be ready for use.
- A tarp or other cover for the pile may help maintain moisture during hot months and keep the pile from becoming soggy during heavy or frequent rains.
- Shredding brown leaves before adding them to the compost pile will hasten their decomposition.
- Materials added to the compost pile should be no larger than 2 square inches.

The next newsletter will cover when and how to use your compost, and provide trouble-shooting information about common compost pile problems.



In the spring issue of EnviroSmart we asked what gardening tasks you struggle with the most in the summer. Watering and Pests/Disease were the most selected topics. Whenever a plant's overall health is stressed (such as during extreme heat or drought conditions) it is more susceptible to pests and disease. Choosing appropriate plants for our zone (8a) and choosing native or adapted plants whenever possible will give your plants a fighting chance during our brutal summers. Read on for more information and resources.

With no rain in sight and possibilities of more water restrictions, we need to do all we can to conserve water and save our landscape. Our landscape adds value to our property. Landscaping can also save on our utility bills by creating insulation and shade by planting trees and shrubs. When your plants are under stress from watering either too much or not enough, insect and disease problems can begin to appear. Practicing good watering habits will save you a lot of work, frustration and money in the long run.

Steps to Manage Water:

First, when choosing plants for our landscapes, it is important to consider using natives that will adapt to the extreme temperatures and drought conditions that we find here in North Texas. For a list of native and adapted plants, check out [Texas Superstar®](#) plants and [Texas Earth-Kind®](#) landscaping.

Second, more attention needs to be paid to appropriate use of lawn irrigation systems. Irrigation systems need to be inspected on a regular basis. They need to be checked for broken sprinkler heads and those that need to be adjusted so they are not blocked or wasting water by spraying on sidewalks. During the summer months, sprinklers should run at least 15 minutes per zone. The goal is to apply 1 inch of water per week, letting the water soak in deep and just on the surface. To prevent runoff, you may need to run several shorter cycles allowing the water to soak in before running it again.

Third, putting down a 2-3 inch layer of shredded mulch helps to retain moisture around plants and helps to cool the soil. Mulch also helps with weed control and soil borne diseases.

If you have planted anything new in your landscape in the last 2-3 years, it will need to be hand watered. Even drought tolerant plants need time to become established. Deep watering (soaking the root ball) can be achieved by putting the hose on a slow trickle and monitoring for runoff.

How to Plant a Plant From Pot to Plot

So, you bought all those new plants at the nursery or the plant sale. Now what do you do with them? You don't want to leave your new plants too long in the plastic nursery containers they came in. Plants will overheat in the sun and dry out much faster in those containers as opposed to in the ground or a regular pot.

Move those plants from their temporary pots into the ground or suitable container. Begin by digging a hole as deep as the plant's root ball and a little wider. Gently remove the plant from its container by tipping it over into your hand and gently squeezing the sides of the container to loosen if necessary. If roots are in a ball or completely cover the soil, tease them gently apart. Teasing the roots apart before planting encourages the roots to grow outward. Leaving the root ball tightly wound or in the shape the container can encourage the roots to continue to grow around themselves instead of spreading out. This can eventually cause a plant to become stunted or generally unhealthy. Place the plant in a



prepared hole. It should sit at soil level, or a little higher. Fill the hole with soil around the root ball, pressing the soil down as you go to make sure the roots are in contact with the soil and to eliminate air pockets.

Water thoroughly and apply a layer of organic mulch around the base of the plant to retain moisture and regulate soil temperature. Water regularly, especially during the first few weeks, to help the plant establish its roots. Prune any damaged or wilted leaves to reduce stress on the plant. Consider recycling the containers.

Hydrangea Care



Whether you are a brand new or long-time hydrangea gardener, this growing season may have presented you with the question: “why aren’t there any blooms?” This is a good question for those who have French or Big Leaf Hydrangeas, commonly known as mopheads (*Hydrangea macrophylla*). This variety boasts beautiful, large blooms in elegant colors of pink, blue or purple and are featured every spring in garden centers. However, unlike the cold hardy Oakleaf and Limelight varieties, which are both popular and do quite well in the cold and heat in our zone 8A, the mopheads, in fact are quite finicky. They do not fare well in extreme frigid temperatures, like the 10°F we experienced this past December or the long stretch of below freezing temperatures and ice from early February. The extremely low temperatures, along with the brutal summer heat are huge stressors, which cause the plant to go into full

survival mode. This means that the plant is utilizing most of its energy to stay alive so that it has the energy to produce blooms.

All varieties of hydrangeas require a lot of water and well-drained soil for true success. They are best suited for semi-shade with either a northern or eastern exposure and not full sun or the leaves will scorch. If you decide to relocate your hydrangeas, fall season is best as temperatures are cooler and they have time to acclimate before winter approaches. Appropriate soil amendments may be necessary, depending on whether you prefer pink or blue colors. The soil acidity determines the color. The most common color for mopheads is pink, as most plant nurseries grow them in alkaline soil. If you are enamored by blue hues, strong acidic soil is required. You can find amendments specified for this preference at your local garden center. Remember, do not fertilize until spring! Over-fertilization is also a factor in bloom formation.

A happy hydrangea gardener is a patient gardener, so don’t fret or worry. Keep watering, allow nature to take its course, provide the correct type and amount of fertilizer, as recommended, and come next spring perhaps you will have beautiful, full blooms!

How to Plant Wildflowers

Wildflower planting dates depend on location and weather patterns. Rockwall County is in Zone 8a according to the USDA Plant Hardiness Map. The recommended planting dates are October 1st - December 1st. The seeds will remain dormant within the soil until early spring. Placement has a big impact on the success of plants. Select a site that has supplemental water available and well-draining soil that is not compacted. The location should receive a great deal of sunshine per day. The flowers require a minimum of eight hours of direct sunlight per day. Some species tolerate partial shade. The source of your seeds should provide this information as well as other information to encourage successful results. Sow only to the depth recommended. It is better to sow the seeds too shallow than too deep. Do not cover the seeds.



1. Mow or eliminate any existing or dead vegetation. Remove this material. Rake or lightly till the surface of the soil. No more than one inch in depth.
2. Mix seeds with a carrier such as masonry sand, perlite, or potting soil. A mixture of one part seed to four parts carrier.
3. Broadcast one half of the seed mixture as uniformly as possible over the prepared area. Sow the remaining seed mixture perpendicular to the original pattern.
4. Press the newly planted seeds into the soil by walking or rolling over them. Do not cover any deeper than 1/16 inch.
5. Gently apply supplemental watering if needed. The area should remain moist for 4-6 weeks. The area should not be allowed to completely dry.
6. Extreme weather conditions: hail, drought, excessive rainfall, flooding, or unseasonably cold temperatures may be harmful.

Fall Vegetable Gardening

with Laura!



As always, fall is a welcome respite from the brutal temperatures of summer. While we hope cooler temperatures arrive soon, it looks like this heat may hang around. Therefore, pay special attention to the “seed indoors” section for September. As of the writing of this article (in late August) the soil temperature was in the high 90s. Many of these leafy greens won’t germinate in soil that hot (45 to 85°F is ideal). These leafy greens grow best in temperatures of 60-75°F – as they can withstand frost, you’ll have plenty of time to transplant outside!

September

Seed Outdoors – Beans (pinto, bush), Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Onion, Parsnips, Peas, Radish, Spinach, Summer Squash, Swiss

Chard, Turnips

Transplant – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Spinach, Summer Squash, Swiss Chard

Seed Indoors – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Kale, Lettuce, Peas, Spinach, Swiss Chard

October

Seed Outdoors – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Onion, Radish, Spinach, Swiss Chard, Turnips

Transplant – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Spinach, Swiss Chard

November

Transplant – Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Greens (Collard, Mustard), Kale, Lettuce, Spinach, Swiss Chard

Herbs

Let’s highlight **Cilantro**! This herb is often used in salsas, guacamole, soups, salads, on tacos or to spice up rice. This herb is also a valuable double hitter – if you allow cilantro to flower, you’ll get the spice coriander from the seeds! In other countries, all parts of this plant are called coriander or Asian parsley. Only in the American continents are the stems and leaves called cilantro, while the seeds are referred to as coriander.

Now I’ll be honest with you here, dear reader, I don’t actually like cilantro. I have the weird genetic quirk that makes cilantro taste awful to me (seriously google it!). However, I still grow cilantro! Some members of my family love cilantro and it’s a great source of vitamins for my chickens. Additionally, the delicate white flowers attract pollinators to the garden and coriander seeds DO taste good.

Cilantro is a cool season annual. The best times to plant are in February for an April harvest (or let it go to seed in the summer heat), and again starting in September for a November and potentially through winter harvest. Cilantro can be started or grown indoors and is a great candidate for succession planting – sow new seeds every couple of weeks. Cilantro can tolerate temperatures as low as 10°F, but I still protect with frost cloth during a hard, icy freeze. Cilantro may not flower in the fall, as heat usually triggers flowering, but give it a try this fall so you'll be ready for spring.

Fall To-Do List

PLANT

- Trees and shrubs- this allows time for root systems to develop before summer.
- Wildflower seeds.
- Daffodils in late fall to early winter.
- Tulips and hyacinths in mid to late December. They must be chilled at 45°F for a minimum of 45 days prior to planting.
- Fall flowering perennials.
- Turf grass by mid-September to establish roots before winter.
- Cool season color- pinks, snapdragons, ornamental cabbage & kale.
- Pansies and violas in October when evenings become cool (warm weather can cause lanky plants).

FERTILIZE

- Container plants with diluted, water-soluble, high-nitrogen food with each watering.
- Lawns based on soil test recommendations. Do not fertilize after October.

TASKS

- Mow grass regularly to the recommended height until the first frost. Let mulched grass clippings stay on the lawn.
- Apply pre-emergent herbicide to prevent broad leaf and grassy weeds.
- Water as needed but follow any restrictions in your area.
- Divide spring flowering perennials- such as daylilies, irises, coneflowers, hostas, and Shasta daisies.

Community Poll

Would you purchase fresh greenery (wreaths & garland) from a Master Gardener winter sale?

Yes

No

Master SNAPS!

Rockwall County Extension Master Gardeners share photos of what inspires them.



Watching pollinators in my native garden and hand-making propagation stations.
-Jen B.



Lucy and her zinnias.
-Lisa W.



I plant fennel every year for Black Swallowtail butterflies. This one plant has 15 hungry caterpillars.
-Deborah B.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes listing Navasota false foxglove (*Agalinis navasotensis*), a rare annual plant native to Southeast Texas, as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The plant is known to exist in only three locations – one of which is in Tyler County. The wildflower species is imperiled due to its limited distribution, drought, and encroachment from trees that shade out sunlight. By protecting the plant as an endangered species, its habitat would be protected, and a recovery plan would be implemented.



Pokey!



EnviroSmart

Michele Campbell, Editor

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