

April 2014

## **Favorite Flower – Texas Bluebonnet**

by Marilyn Cranford, Somervell County Master Gardener



As spring is just around the corner, be on the lookout for the Texas Bluebonnet. This Texas trademark is to Texas what a shamrock is to Ireland. The Texas Blue-bonnet, or lupines texensis, is the state flower as all Texans know. Native American (Texans) wove fascinating folk tales around this special wildflower, crediting them with everything from having natural medicinal qualities to being spiritual messengers from the heavens.

Just how this delicate blue beauty became the official state flower is a little-known story. In 1901, when the issue was up for a vote in the state legislature, the bluebonnet was running second to the cotton flower and the bloom of the Prickly Pear advocated by John Nance Garner who later became vice-president of the United States. However, his efforts were unsuccessful and bowed to the lobbying efforts of a ladies group who made sure the bluebonnet was designated as the official flower of Texas.

Those who have tried to grow this beautiful wildflower, understand that patience is the primary ingredient. Therefore, it may take several years to establish a good stand of bluebonnets in your yard. For the most successful results, plant the seeds in October through November. The seeds will germinate in the fall and grow throughout the winter, usually blooming around the end of March to mid-May. Choose a sunny, well-drained location with slightly alkaline soil. With a little rain and a lot of patience the results will be a blue blanket of beautiful bluebonnets that return year after year.

Happy Gardening!

# Gardening Tips for April

By Shirley D. Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener



Well, spring has sprung! I can tell by all the weeds sprouting in my yard and flowerbeds! Yep, it's here whether our mornings feel like it or not, which have been cool or even cold. And, now that the growing season has begun, I would like to pass on to you a few tips to perhaps make your gardening chores a little easier.

If you planted early (as I did), then you may be seeing bad (as opposed to good) insects. You can wrap a piece of very sticky tape around your fingers (sticky side out) and blot off the insects. I am going to try this on my spinach. The aphids seem to love it.

Here is another aphid hint: Did you know that they are attracted to the color yellow? Set a shallow, yellow pan of soapy water near your infested plants and the aphids will plunge to a watering end.

If you own an aquarium (large or small) then know that the water is filled with luscious nutrients and trace elements for your plants. Whenever you clean your aquarium, pour the old water into a bucket or watering can and use it on your plants.

Also, save the water from the vegetables you just steamed/cooked. Let the liquid cool, then water your plants with the broth; it's fortified with trace elements and minerals.

If you've forgotten to water a treasured plant, and it's dry, wilted and looks hopeless (and who hasn't done this), apologize to it, then plunge it into a bucket of warm water (higher than the rim of the pot) and allow it to soak until the bubbles stop rising. Remove it from the water, let it drain, then set it back on a pebble-filled saucer.

Happy Spring Gardening!

# Are You Smarter Than A Fox Squirrel?

By Sheryl Kleinschmidt, Somervell County Master Gardener

If you've ever watched the program, "Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?" then you know what I'm talking about. I live in an old part of Glen Rose near the river and believe me, the squirrels here make me wonder which of us has the highest IQ.



First off, they are quite established, most likely due to a constant water source (The Paluxy River) and the abundance of old pecan and oak trees in the area. But, if nature has already provided them an awesome source

of sustenance, why do they continually dig in my flower pots, flower beds and eat all of my birdseed? The answer—they like to eat cafeteria-style.



The fox squirrel, *Sciurus niger*, prefers nuts, but will also eat flowers, flower buds, leaves, tubers, bulbs and seeds. Add to that palate insects, bird eggs, and agricultural crops such as corn, and these little beggars can become quite destructive.

I've tried a number of "squirrel-proof" birdfeeders (they aren't), greased the shepherd's hook with Crisco to keep them from climbing it, and put red pepper in my flower pots. Thus far, the score is squirrels—85% to my 15%, but I keep trying.

One of the older males I have dubbed "Einstein". He and I have recently engaged in battle over my prized birdfeeder filled with sunflower seeds. You see, Einstein would rather eat sunflower seeds than anything else and will do most anything to obtain them. So far, I've won this battle by suspending the birdfeeder on a rather slim branch of the Catalpa tree outside my kitchen window. Einstein's weight is too much for the little branch and he either falls off or unsuccessfully hangs upside down while grabbing for the feeder.

There are a few other tricks I've discovered to protect my plants—especially the potted ones outdoors. The red pepper does deter the squirrels, but it has to be reapplied after a couple of waterings. Once the plants are established, the squirrels pretty much leave them alone, however, and you can leave off the pepper.

Lava rocks (or any other rocks for that matter) placed around the roots of smaller plants has worked pretty well and heavy mulch is also a deterrent. However, nothing is fool-proof. I've had to cover my old wash pot filled with spearmint as it is a favorite burial ground for hoarded pecans and acorns.

So far this spring, I at least feel a sense of progress in out-smarting my furry friends. But, I do allow



them some space as they provide a lot of entertainment for me and my family. We've even trained some of them to chase after pecans just as a dog would chase a stick. Nuisance that they are, they're here to stay and I still have to say, "I am not smarter than a fox-squirrel!"

# Community Horticulture Education Series

Somervell County Master Gardeners

Community Horticulture Education Series (CHES)

Monday, April 14th at 6:30 pm

209 SW Barnard Street, Glen Rose

Free and Open to the Public



This month's education program is entitled "RETURN OF THE KING" and will be presented by Fossil Rim's Natural Resources Specialist, Curt Decker. Decker will be talking about none other than the Monarch Butterfly. He is concerned about the cross-border migration of the Monarch as well as establishing healthy breeding grounds for them as they visit our area.

Decker will also be discussing other issues relating to the Monarch such as raising feeder plants and international current events that affect the butterflies.

Our own Master Gardener, Bonnah Boyd, will also speak Monday night. She will teach us how to germinate and plant milkweed, which is a host plant for Monarch larvae.

We invite the community to join us at 6:30 p.m. at the Citizens' Center at 209 SW Barnard Street here in Glen Rose. As always, this program is a free public service given by Somervell County Master Gardeners.