

# WILLIAMSON COUNTY **GARDENING**

February 2019



TEXAS A&M  
**AGRILIFE**  
EXTENSION



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Cover:

WCMG Rose Demo Garden

Photo by Jim Williams,  
MG 2017

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## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We all have a fear of one thing or another in our lives. For some it might be a small fear, and for others the fear stops them from being able to function. One of my biggest fears has always been deep water, deep enough where you can't see the bottom. Back in my younger years, my older brother informed me I was going to learn to waterski. The thought of being in that deep water almost kept me from trying. Even though I knew the ski jacket would hold me up, the fear still controlled me. He suggested we start in the cove where the water was shallow. It wasn't long until I was water-skiing, and I have enjoyed the sport for many years. However, that first jump into the lake on each future trip, always scared me a bit.

Although I am still fearful of water, I have managed to avoid the fear of public speaking. Thinking back, I realize I was often pushed, beyond my comfort zone, when I was younger. While serving detention in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (probably for cutting up in class), the teacher informed me that I could avoid detention if I auditioned for the school play. Next thing I know I'm on the stage and playing the role of the old man that yelled a lot (foresight no doubt). As an adult, I was often talking and presenting to small and large groups as a key part of my job.

Like jumping in the lake, I still feel that ping of fear before speaking. It is more of a "does my information on the topic flow properly" fear and not a "will I sink or swim" fear. I have found that speaking about gardening or compost seems to be the least fearful for me. Gardeners are the best audiences. No matter the subject, someone always does it differently, and everyone wants to learn about it. If you've been to the nursery and talked to someone about plants or gardening, you probably don't feel that is the same as standing before a group. It is very similar. It's the same gardener with the same questions, just a different location.

As an organization we are stewards for all things gardening. Do you realize how many people have a fear of gardening? We continually get asked to have someone go and speak at all kinds of gardening functions in the county. However, this task seems to fall on only a handful of our Master Gardeners, and we can't attend all the events. We need more of you to get involved with the Speaker's Bureau. You can be the main speaker, or support staff and help answer questions at the end. It may even help you learn more about the material, and expand your comfort level with the subject.

I hope to get more of you to wade into that shallow end of the cove. Slowly learn to reduce that fear and realize that speaking to gardeners is the same as talking with your neighbors, friends or even relatives. They will always greet you with a smile and thank you for the information.

Tommy King  
President

# Congratulations to Our New Master Gardeners from the 2018 Class

Steve Craig  
Cheryl Cutliff  
John Gardner  
Colette Grier  
Dale Hill

Victoria Lew  
Liz Sheehan  
Deborah Spanel  
Mike Voss

## The AgriLife Extension Office has Moved

Our offices have moved to the new county building at 100 Wilco Way, Suite AG201. It is still off SE Inner Loop but now closer to Leander Road, 1460. It is the gray-brown two story brick building and the offices are located on the second floor. The monthly meeting next Monday, February 11th will still be in the Training Room at the old location as will Hands On In The Garden on Saturday, February 23rd. Once everybody is all moved in and settled an open house is anticipated.





# How to Grow Potatoes in a Bag

## A fun project for kids of all ages!

By Judy Ebaugh, MG 2017

February is planting season for Irish Potatoes. But what if you don't have the space to grow them? Use a recyclable grocery bag! This is a super fun project for kids. It requires a minimal amount of equipment, is portable, and causes very little mess.

### Materials needed:

Recyclable grocery bag. (Fabric or plastic-type material will work.)

One bag of soil (from your garden or the store)

Vegetable fertilizer or compost

Organic potatoes or seed potatoes (enough for 4 "eyes" per bag)

Patch of sun for at least 8 hours per day

Extra container for sprouting "eyes" (optional)

Gardening sulfur or wood ash



### Instructions:

**Purchase seed potatoes** at your favorite nursery, or buy organic potatoes at the grocery store.

The potatoes should be organic if you want to be sure that anti-growth agents have not been sprayed on them. Non-organic potatoes will grow as well, but may take longer. (For more information on chemicals used during potato processing see this link from the Idaho Potato Growers: <https://idahopotato.com/dr-potato/chemicals-on-potatoes>)

**Prepare the "eyes".** Cut the potatoes in 2" chunks, no larger than an egg, with two "eyes" per chunk if possible. Dip the pieces in garden sulfur to prevent fungal diseases, and sit them in a warm dark place to dry out for a few days.

**Prepare the bag.** Fill your bag with 8" – 12" of soil. A rich gardening soil that is loose and full of organic material is best. I have used backyard soil and amended it with compost, as well as commer-

cial soil . Both worked well. Roll the top of the bag down, just about to the soil line. You may put drainage holes in the bag to prevent rotting, should rain or too much watering occur. If you are planning to let the bags sit on the ground, you might NOT want drainage holes so that red ants and other outside pests won't find your potatoes.

**Plant the “eyes”.** When the “eyes” have dried out you can plant them. I have waited as little as one day, and as much as one week before planting. Planting too early may risk rotting. Planting too late may cause the sprout to die if it cannot get enough nutrients. Plant three or four chunks in each bag, depending on bag size. Cover with 2” - 3” of soil. Some people swear that the eyes should face up, some people say down, but they will still grow either way!



**Add soil as the potato plants grow.** When the plants get about 6” – 8” tall, cover them in soil and/or straw so that just a few leaves stick out. This can be done two or three times by unrolling the bag a little as you go. Straw may be used as a mulch on top of your soil to help retain moisture. Some people use only straw to cover their plants so it will be easier and cleaner to harvest the potatoes. However, in my experience too much straw makes it difficult to keep the potatoes moist if the weather suddenly turns very hot.

**Fertilize.** If you have really rich soil, the potatoes will grow without additional fertilizer. But if you want to boost your crop, add compost or commercial fertilizer that is higher in potassium (supports the tubers) and lower in nitrogen (supports the leaves).



**Harvest!** Half of the fun is digging around a little to see if the potatoes are growing. If the plant is not disturbed too much, you may harvest a few as they grow. You will know that they are fully mature when the leaves turn yellow and die back. They can be harvested right away and eaten, or they can sit in the bag for a few weeks to let the skins get tougher for storage....but I bet they won't last long!

For more detailed information on how to grow garden potatoes in Texas, see the following article by Joseph Masabni, TAMU. <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/browse/featured-solutions/gardening-landscaping/irish-potatoes/>



# In the Herb Garden

by Alice Stultz, MG 1996

## HOREHOUND

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) in the Labiatae family is one of the perennial herbs in the garden.<sup>1</sup> It is in the mint family and the leaf looks like a rough, frilly mint leaf. It is considered a Texas native and grows wild and well west of here. It is dug up as a nuisance plant in areas planted for livestock. It is an old-time folk remedy for coughs and one can still purchase horehound drops in country stores. Most of our ancestors probably had this cough drop in their medicine cabinet. There are, of course, recipes on line for making your own cough drops from the leaves. It has a gray-green leaf so does not take as much water as green leafed plants.



<sup>1</sup>Hill, Madalene, Gwen Barclay and Jean Hardy, Southern Herb Growing, Shearer Publishing, Fredericksburg, TX, 1987, p.92.

## It's Time for Dues

It's time to pay our yearly dues for 2019. Treasurer Sandra Roberson, will be accepting your \$25 at the membership meeting Monday, February 11th. Cash or checks will be accepted. If you are not planning to attend the meeting you can mail the check to her home.

Sandra sent out an email this week with her mailing address so please check your email.

# Winola's Timely Tips for February

by Winola VanArtsdalen, MG 2007

It's February. Time to really get busy!

Remember that February through June is period nitidulid beetle that spreads oak wilt is most active. Any time of year, wounds on oaks must be painted, but, especially during this period of mild weather, avoid trimming oaks susceptible to oak wilt!

## **TURF:**

Pre-emergent weed control must be used early enough to keep seeds from sprouting. For spring weeds, it must be on your turf now! Be making plans to spread compost and aerate turf next month to add nutrients and increase water-holding capacity.

If lawn has a history of brown patch problems, treat with a labeled fungicide late in the month. Repeat treatment in 3 to 4 weeks, if needed. If you use corn gluten, timing is essential, and you need to check with reliable local supplier or county extension office help desk for time of treatment.

## **PRUNING:**

Hopefully, you have already pruned crape myrtles and other plants that bloom on this year's growth. It is still time if you want to plant shrubs for shade or screen such as cherry laurel, wax myrtle, and yaupon or other hollies.

Now in late winter, before spring growth, usually mid-February to early March, trim back roses and other herbaceous shrubs with slant cut, where stem joins another branch or at main branch.

Cut back growth a few inches above ground, if you have not already done so, on perennials, but do not yet dig up plants that appear to be frozen. You might have a pleasant surprise later when you find some have that looked lost have survived!

Finish pruning trees and evergreen shrubs. Wait to trim spring bloomers until after spring bloom. Cut back everblooming roses around middle of month before spring growth begins. Rejuvenate older multi-stemmed shrubs/trees by removing oldest stems at crown. This is important to keep bush healthy. Avoid "shearing" shrubs by just cutting back all ends of branches. This spoils natural shape and does not allow sunlight to reach interior of bush.



**PLANTING:**

Yes, it is time to be prepare for spring planting, but NEVER dig wet soil! If it sticks to your spade, this is too soon, and, if you continue, you will damage soil structure.

Be prepared for unexpected hard freeze, but plant shade, ornamental and fruit trees now.

Herbs you will want to plant now are cilantro, parsley, chives, dill, fennel, garlic chives, lemon balm, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage and thyme. These need not be restricted to herb garden.

## Artemisia and Santolina

**by Alice Stultz, MG 1996**

These are two of the herbs in the Herb Garden that thrive in poor soil and low water. They are both very aromatic and have a similar mounding spread.

Artemisia is a perennial that is very aromatic with a yellow bloom. 'Silver King' Artemisia (*Artemisia albul*a 'Silver King') has gray foliage that is spindly and lacy. It is sometimes called ghost plant. The common wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) can grow to about three feet tall and has a history of being used as an insect repellent in linen closets and in making the liqueur absinthe. One can see the wild artemisia on Texas roadways. All are easily propagated by cuttings and division transplants. Artemisia Powis Castle and Dusty Miller, the wider leafed artemisia, are both commonly sold in garden shops.

The gray-leaf Santolina (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*) is a woody, low growing, spreading shrub. It is also referred to as lavender cotton and makes a nice border plant. It is sometimes used in very formal, planned garden "knots", using the plants to weave through each other in a formal design. It has a yellow, rayless flower. The rough leaves are said to repel moths with their benzoin-like scent. This plant does well in higher, drier beds in full sun. The green-leaf Santolina can take more water but still likes dry, more rocky soil.

These two plants with their low water, high sun needs can be used in drier areas with good drainage. They also are not as susceptible to deer with their fragrances.

# ROVER ANTS

By Wizzie Brown

Travis County AgriLife Extension Program Specialist—IPM / Entomology

Rover ants are tiny (~1/16" long) and brownish-black. They have 9 antennal segments which can differentiate them from many other ants, but you'll need a good hand lens or microscope to count antennal segments. The abdomen of rover ants is pudgy and the ants have a "humpbacked" appearance.

Colonies, or nests, are small and have a single queen. They are often seen outside nesting under or inside of flower pots, under stones or other landscaping material, or running up and down areas like patio furniture or the foundation of the home. If rover ants find their way indoors, they can be found usually in areas of moisture- kitchen, bathrooms, and near plumbing leaks.



Rover ants do tend honeydew-producing insects, so may be found on plants. If you discover them on a plant, you need to look for other insects such as aphids, mealybugs, or scale insects as that will be the true source of damage to the plant. The ants will protect the honeydew-producing insect from predators and parasites, but they do not cause direct harm to the plant.

Rover ants can be difficult to manage at times since they can be a bit persnickety about bait products. They do seem to take liquid baits fairly well, but you may need to try several kinds of bait before finding one that will work best for your ants. Sprays should not be used to treat for rover ants since this can split the colony up and make the ants more difficult to manage.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

This work is supported by Crops Protection and Pest Management Competitive Grants Program [grant no. 2017-70006-27188 /project accession no. 1013905] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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# A Field Trip to De Leon

Photos by Rick Halle, MG 2017 & Mike Harper, MG 2009





# Gardening Texas Style

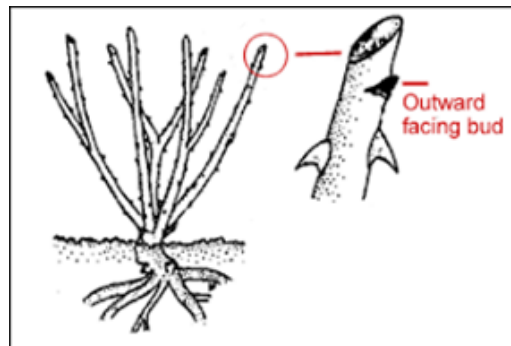


## Growing Roses in Central

by Val Black, MG 2014

What kind of rose would you like to grow? Roses are one of my favorite plants and I think they have received a bad reputation for being difficult to grow. While that may be true for some of them, there are now many hybrid varieties that do very well with little maintenance, and they bloom more prolifically. There are many different types of roses; do your research and choose wisely the type that works for your needs. The American Rose Society has information on the different types of roses. Roses are rated for disease resistance, smell and heat tolerance. There are many cultivars that are black spot resistant and heat tolerant. Those are the varieties I prefer for myself. You can actually take time to smell the roses, instead of spraying for fungus and diseases all the time!

Pruning here is usually done between mid February and the first week in March. Tools needed are sharp sterilized pruners, loppers and long gloves. In general with most shrub types, cut 1/3 of the bush back, then prune 1/4 inch above the outward facing dormant bud at a 45 degree angle. This will help shape the brush outward leaving air circulation more to the center of the bush. Always cut back any dead wood, especially at the bud union at the base of the plant. Typically I don't prune climbers. If they are out of control, trim back to 4 feet from the ground. Most roses will bloom more prolifically with a good trim. I usually do a light fall trim, to make sure they have time to flush out again with one more bloom before a hard freeze. Remember to sterilize pruners between bushes. I just carry a can of Lysol to spray both sides of the blades between each plant.



I like to fertilize at the end of February. There are many types of rose fertilizers on the market. When in doubt use a timed release, organic. Remember organic materials do take time to break down for use to the plant. A good organic fertilizer worked into the soil a few inches, always from base of the plant is always an excellent choice. With our high pH soil it is always good to feed your banana peels and egg shells to your plants. After a big flush of blooms I fertilize again. Roses are heavy feeders. During the summers months I feed once a month or give them a slow release fertilizer.



Winter in Central Texas is the best time to plant. Plant in a morning sun location with at least 3 to 6 feet between plants (depending on the fully mature size) to allow good air circulation between your plants. Roses need at least 6-8 hours of sun a day. Use 50% compost in your soil to give you good drainage. Roses are prone to several fungal diseases: black spot, and powdery mildew. Fungus needs water to grow, so to prevent this, use drip irrigation and good air circulation. Typically, roses need about 1 inch of water a week. Probably more when it is 100 degrees here. Apply three inches of a native mulch around your roses to maintain an average temperature, reduce weeds, and as it breaks down it will fertilize your plants. Trim back any stems that grow on the ground to alleviate pests and fungus. Rain will cause spores to be splashed on the leaves from the ground causing a fungal problem. If you follow the above tips, you will be rewarded with beautiful roses.

References: American Rose Society, <https://www.rose.org>

[Aggiehorticulture.org](http://Aggiehorticulture.org), [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu)

Gardening Questions email me at [SunCityGardening@sctexas.org](mailto:SunCityGardening@sctexas.org). You can also contact Agri-LIFE Extension Services at 512-943-3300.

Gardening Question from reader: "Thanks for trim tip for the Crepe Myrtle. Now what to do with the Esperanza? Lost its leaves in the first frost so is it dead or just wintering? Should I trim it drastically to get it back down to size? Was hoping to get it tall enough the deer would leave it alone..."

Thanks Patti

Answer: Trim back Esperanzas (Yellowbells) and Pride of Barbados plants 1-2in. from the ground at the end of January, so you can find them in the spring. Remember they take a little longer to come out in the spring.





# Cameras in the Demo Gardens!

Photography by Sonia Schuetze, MG 2016





# Fruit Tree Chilling Hours

**by Garry Bowman, MG 2014**

Some fruit trees like avocado, mango and citrus are very sensitive to the cold and historically have not done well in Williamson County because of that. Then there are other fruit tree varieties that grow well up north, but not here because it does not get cold enough!

While we can't control how much cold weather we will or won't get, we do have some control over the fruit tree varieties we choose to plant. Hardiness zone and chilling hour recommendations are two different things to consider.

Since we are in USDA hardiness zone 8b where the average coldest temperature is 15 to 20° F , we want trees adapted for zone 8b. We also want trees within the range of our normal chilling hours. Chilling hours refers to how many hours during the winter the temperature is between 32 and 45° F. Hours below 32° are not counted and hours at 60° and higher are subtracted from the total. Williamson County averages 700 chill hours a year over a 10 year period. This may range from 550



hrs one year to 850 hrs the next. Fruit trees vary greatly in their chill hour requirements. Some need just a few hundred and others a thousand or more. Select fruit trees in the 650-750 chill hour range for the best chance of success.

Deciduous fruit trees originally came from northern climates and evolved to go dormant in the winter as protection from cold freezing weather. The dormancy process begins in the late summer and fall when temperatures drop and days become shorter. The tree responds by producing hormones which causes it to shed leaves and enter dormancy.

The amount of dormancy hormone produced is how much it needs to get through a typical winter where it originated from. During the winter, temperatures between 32 and 45° F start breaking down the hormone reserves. If a warm snap occurs during the winter and the tree has not met its chilling hour requirement, there is still dormancy hormone present. This helps the tree ignore the warm snap and stay in dormancy. Once the tree has met its chill hour requirement and the temperature starts warming, the tree will break dormancy.

Choosing a tree with too many or too few chilling hour requirements can cause problems. With too few hours, it can break dormancy too early and be damaged by late freezes. With too many hours, it may break dormancy too late and have serious bloom and leaf out issues.

The Williamson County Extension Horticultural Agent and WCMG Help Desk can recommend fruit tree varieties that have the best success at producing fruit in this area based on Texas A&M University research. When recommending fruit trees, we look at a number of factors including resistant to pests/diseases in this area, tolerance for our alkaline soil and clay/rock soil types, hardiness zone compatibility and chilling hours requirements if any as well as other factors.





# From Garden to Table

## Roasted Red Cabbage

by Radhika Baliga, MG 2015

### Roasted Red Cabbage with Maple Mustard Sauce

This is my favorite way to enjoy red cabbage. It's quick, delicious, and eye-popping. Adapted from thekitchn.com.

#### Ingredients

½ head red cabbage  
4 Tbsp olive oil, plus more for roasting  
1 Tbsp whole grain mustard  
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard  
1 Tbsp maple syrup  
1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar  
salt and pepper, to taste

#### Directions

1. Heat oven to 425 deg F.
2. Prepare the maple mustard sauce. In a medium bowl, whisk together the olive oil, mustard, maple syrup, and apple cider vinegar. Set the sauce aside.
3. Cut cabbage into 4-6 wedges, leaving the core intact. Place the wedges on a large rimmed baking sheet. Lightly drizzle the wedges with olive oil. Flip the wedges over and apply more olive oil. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Roast the cabbage in the oven for 12 min. Flip the wedges over with a spatula and roast another 10-15 min. The wedges are done when they are easily pierced with a paring knife and their edges are nicely browned.
5. Drizzle the cabbage with the maple mustard sauce. Serve warm.



**Recipe Search:** Next month's newsletter will feature recipes for kale and collard greens. If you have a recipe to share, email me (search for Radhika Baliga on VMS) by Feb 10 so we can discuss details.



# WCMGA EVENTS

## February 4

WCMGA Board Meeting

AgrLife Training Room, 100 Wilco Way, AG201

1 to 3 pm

All members are welcome to attend.

## February 5

“Pecan & Fruit Tree Planting & Pruning”

with Dr. Larry Stein

AgrLife Training Room, 3151 SE Inner Loop

10 to 12 am

“Hands on Pruning” demonstration and practice

Berry Springs Park

Begins at 1 pm

## February 6

Green Thumbs Up Gardening Series: Round Rock

Round Rock Public Library

6:30 to 7:30 pm

“Basic Garden Maintenance”

with MG Jim Williams

## February 11

WCMGA Monthly Membership Meeting

AgrLife Training Room, 3151 SE Inner Loop

6:30 to 8 pm

“Tool Maintenance”

with MGs Steve Echols and Jim Williams

## February 14

Green Thumbs Up Gardening Series: Cedar Park

Cedar Park Public Library

6:45 to 8:15 pm

“Basic Garden Maintenance”

with MG Jim Williams

## February 23

Hands On In The Garden

AgrLife Training Room, 3151 SE Inner Loop

9 to 11 am

“Soil Testing and Amendments”

with MG Jim Williams





**See You Next Month  
We'll Wait Right Here**