

MG WOOD WORKS



Peggy Rogers: President's Message

Hello Gardeners,

Sixteen, yes, that is 16 degrees and that is probably the high for today. This morning when I woke up, it was only 5 degrees with 7 inches of snow. It's just about the same all over Texas.

It will be interesting to see what plants we lose, and surely we will lose some because most of our perennials are only good for 25 degrees. We may see some heaving of the soil which can expose roots, bulbs and rhizomes; so check them carefully. However, the snow may serve as a blanket keeping the roots from freezing.

There is always hope, but I expect losses in our gardens. And it's not over; there is more to come!

The pandemic still rages but with less force. CDC and Wood County guideline requirements for meetings of any type are mask, 6-foot social distancing, and 50 percent capacity. The TMGA February Zoom Directors meeting was interrupted with hacking known as Zoom-bombing. I did not enjoy the ugly words displayed for everyone to see; so now I'm reluctant to have a Zoom meeting.

This is a good time to be working on your CEUs and recording your hours in VMS (Volunteer Management System).

We continue with prayers for all our Master Gardeners and families that have survived COVID-19, illnesses, deaths, and accidents.

Ann Reynolds: Hawkins Project Update

Things have been slow in the gardens at the Hawkins project. Since there are a lot of native plants, along with reseeding annuals and perennials, a wait-and-see approach is the best in flowerbed maintenance. We have a healthy crop of Texas bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*) which are being transplanted to the area under the Hawkins City Park sign. When in bloom, they should look stunning against the white rock mulch.



An amazing number of Texas bluebonnets came up from seed in the main flowerbed at the Hawkins City Park.



AnnaLaura Sharker planted bluebonnets under the City Park sign. Photo by Kathy Goodman.

With our extremely cold temperatures, we gardeners begin to get a little antsy. Poor impulse control can be a real liability for us gardeners in February. Shall we try to stifle our urges to start seeds too soon? Or, shall we order plants galore without a plan for where they will go?

I have to keep reminding myself not to buy those "too early in the season" blooming plants from the big box stores. The best bet is to continue to study the bones of the garden and make plans.

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Emily Husmann: Meet the 2021 Texas A&M AgriLife Master Gardener Trainee Class!

Like most meetings and events from this past year, the 2021 Texas A&M AgriLife Master Gardener Trainee Class looks quite different from years past. At the moment, class is held on Tuesdays and Thursdays in a virtual manner on the local and state level. I have hopes to start meeting in-person for hands-on classes that are usually one of the highlights of being a part of the Master Gardener Trainee Class. I have a great group, small but mighty, of five trainees this year who have already started to show their passion and interest in gardening and horticulture.

To date, we have had our Orientation and Introduction to the Texas Master Gardener Association and Wood County Master Gardener Association (WCMGA) and a class on Earth-Kind. We have a Soil class, Water/Irrigation class, and hope to be meeting in-person to learn hands-on about composting later, winter weather and COVID-19 permitting. The trainees look forward to becoming a part of the WCMGA and are doing a great job in class so far.

Allow me to introduce you to the trainees:

- Lori Mays
- Nancy Hollis
- Gus Stearns
- Jennifer and Raymond Frappier

Lori Mays



Lori Mays resides in Winnsboro and has been living in Wood County for the past nine months. Lori's interest in the Wood County Master Gardener Program stems from wanting to learn more about the North Texas growing conditions and what grows best here.

Lori loves irises and making things grow as well as playing in the dirt!

Nancy Hollis

Nancy Hollis is a resident of Winnsboro and has been living in Wood County for seven years. Nancy loves to work in the yard or garden. She was interested in becoming a Master Gardener to increase her horticultural knowledge.

Nancy has grown a garden every year with flowers and shrubs including roses and various perennials.



Raymond and Jennifer Frappier



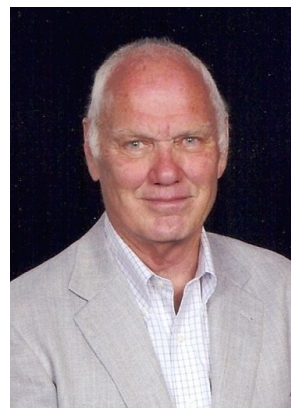
Raymond and Jennifer Frappier live in Emory in Rains County. Raymond and Jennifer's interest in the Wood County Master Gardener Program comes from their desire to become as self-sufficient as possible on their property through gardening.

They have some gardening and horticultural experience, but they are eager to learn more!

Gus Stearns

Gus Stearns is a resident of Hawkins and has called Wood County home for 22 years. Gus became interested in the Wood County Master Gardener Program because of a desire to give back to the community and spend his time in a creative manner!

He used to garden years ago but stopped after spending summers in New Mexico. He is looking forward to getting back into gardening.



**Welcome Texas A&M AgriLife
Master Gardener Trainee
Class of 2021!**

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating. The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

Michele Musser: Updates to the Sensory Garden

The sensory garden at the Mineola Nature Preserve is taking shape! We cleaned up the existing Rosemary, added mulch, and transplanted some plants from other areas in the preserve.

Texas bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*) and mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) plants are new to the garden.

Mullein is also known as "Cowboy toilet paper." I thought this was an appropriate plant seeing as the Sensory Garden is located across from the restrooms! Mullein also is known as American mullein, European or orange mullein, candleflower, candlewick, higtaper, and lungwort.

As the temperatures warm up we will be adding more plants that have unique smells and textures to the garden.



The new bluebonnet plants are located in the front of this photo.

More About Mullein

According to the Drugs.com website, mullein is a woolly-leaved biennial plant. During its first year of growth, the large leaves form a low-lying basal rosette. In the spring of the second year, the plant develops a tall stem that can grow to more than 1.2 meters in height. The top portion of the stem develops yellow flowers that have a faint, honey-like odor.

The flowers, along with the stamens, constitute the active ingredients. Mullein has an illustrious history as a favored herbal remedy and, consequently, has found use for various disorders. Its traditional uses generally have focused on the management of respiratory disorders where it was used to treat asthma, coughs, tuberculosis, and related respiratory problems. However, in its various forms, the plant has been used to treat hemorrhoids, burns, bruises, and gout. The yellow flowers once were used as a source of yellow hair dye. An oil from the flowers has been used to soothe earaches.

Reference: <https://www.drugs.com/npc/mullein.html>

The verywell health website says that in lab tests published in 2002, researchers found that mullein helped kill certain types of bacteria, including *Staphylococcus aureus* (the most common cause of staph infections) and *Escherichia coli* (or *E. coli*).

Herbalists typically use mullein to address the following health problems:

- Upper respiratory tract infections
- Coughs

- Bronchitis
- Asthma

Please note that the use of mullein to treat any condition is not well-supported by scientific data.

Reference: <https://www.verywellhealth.com/the-benefits-of-mullein-89575>

If you do an internet search on "mullein," you will find many articles touting the various uses of the leaves, flowers, and roots of the plant that are used for the treatment of various inflammatory diseases, diarrhea, asthma, coughs and other lung-related ailments — making it one of the top herbs for healing.



Mullein plants add an interesting texture to the Sensory Garden at the Mineola Nature Preserve.

Side Effects and Drug Interactions

The Dr. Axe website has some caveats. When used properly and for a short-term duration, mullein side effects are highly unlikely. In general, the plant has no serious recorded side effects. However, there have been isolated case reports of people developing side effects such as contact dermatitis.

Never use the herbal ear oil if your eardrum is perforated and make sure to consult a physician if symptoms are serious or do not improve quickly with natural treatment.

In terms of interactions, mullein has been reported to inhibit the effectiveness of antidiabetic drugs and it may intensify the effects of muscle relaxants and lithium. If you're taking prescription diuretics, you should talk to your doctor before using the herb since it can also have a diuretic effect.

Mullein products are not recommended for nursing or pregnant women.

Reference: <https://draxe.com/nutrition/mullein/>

Elaine Porter: Proven Winners and Texas Superstar Perennials

I recently attended a class on perennials in Lindale at Plants of Texas. The class was taught by Brenda Swagerty. Classes are held once a month and they usually cost \$25 per class. I go to the ones that give a plant to take home. Most classes are hands-on. This time she gave us a perennial to plant with soil in a pot. Unfortunately, after I got home with my potted plant, my Golden Retriever decided it would be a lot of fun to remove the plant and play with the pot.

Brenda defined a perennial as a plant that comes back two or more years and grows from roots that survive through winter. Because perennials come back for many years, they are a great investment. They also bloom for a shorter time period early, mid-season, or later in the season. Their flowering period lasts a few weeks. She provided colored pictures of each flower and a description of 15 perennials.

Reference: To learn more about upcoming classes, see <https://www.facebook.com/PlantsOfTexas/>

Here are a few of the perennials Brenda talked about.

Decadence® Deluxe “Blue Bubbly” False Indigo (Baptisia hybrid)



Blue Bubbly False Indigo

This plant has fall interest with long 16” bubbly lavender-blue flowers on spikes of blue-green foliage. It can reach 48” tall and wide, attracts bees and butterflies, resists deer, needs 4 to 6 hours of direct sunlight, and is drought tolerant.

Decadence® “Lemon Meringue” False Indigo (Baptisia hybrid)

This plant has fall interest with cool lemony-yellow flowers carried by charcoal gray stems. It has a blue-green foliage, reaches 36” tall and attracts bees and butterflies. It resists deer, needs 4 to 6 hours direct sunlight, and is drought tolerant.



Lemon Meringue False Indigo



Queen of Hearts Heartleaf Brunnera

“Queen of Hearts” Heartleaf Brunnera (Brunnera macrophylla)

This plant has heart-shaped leaves with a pronounced silver overlay and bands of dark green veining. It reaches 18” and spreads to 30”, resists deer, attracts bees, requires shade to part shade, and medium water.

Rainbow Rhythm® “Tiger Swirl” Daylily (Hemerocallis hybrid)



Tiger Swirl Daylily

This exciting daylily is fragrant and features huge 6.5” triangular light golden-yellow flowers with a raspberry eye spiking upwards. It can reach 30” tall with a 24” spread. It is an easy, carefree addition to your garden and it can survive many harsh conditions. A

mid-season July bloomer, it attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, needs 6+ hours of direct sunlight, and has low water needs.

Color Spires® “Violet Riot” Salvia (Salvia nemorosa)



Violet Riot Salvia

This plant produces a riot of vivid violet-blue flowers with deep purple calyxes in a very concentrated show of color in early summer. It reaches a height of 22” and a spread of 24” in a neat dense habit, attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, resists deer and rabbits,

requires 6+ hours of direct sunlight, and low to average water.

Rock ‘N Round™ Sedum “Superstar” (Sedum hybrid)

The star of your late summer garden, this low-growing perennial explodes in rosy-pink flowers with hot-pink carpets over dark smoky foliage, in late summer or early fall, in a dome-like habit. It reaches 12” in height and spreads up to 20”, attracts bees and butterflies, resists rabbits, requires 6+ hours of direct sunlight and low to average water.



Rock ‘N Round Sedum

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.
Isaiah 40:8 KJV

Reference: To learn more about Texas Superstar® plants, see <https://texassuperstar.com/>

Photos courtesy of Proven Winners - www.provenwinners.com

Carolyn West: Extension Office Project Update

The Master Gardener (MG) Class of 2020 has assumed the responsibility of enhancing the grounds at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office in Quitman. Working with Emily Husmann (Wood County Extension Agent-Agriculture and Natural Resources), plans have been reviewed and assessed for costs and viability.

This project was begun by the MG Class of 2019 and was led by Debbie Latham. The beautification was both significant and visible. They established three flower beds and maintained them throughout the year.

To begin, a committee from the MG Class of 2020 discussed the needs of the entire perimeter of the building as the next step in making our sponsorship's residence more professional looking. The committee presented a list of enhancements to Emily Husmann and she reviewed it with her peers.

The proposed enhancement list included:

1. Remove one crosstie from the parking lot. *(Answer: Yes)*
2. Power wash the awnings above the flower bed at the end of the building. *(Answer: Yes)*
3. Build a compost bin at the end of the back alley and clear the brush in the area. *(Answer: Yes and the effort may be used for educational purposes for the MG Class of 2021 and 4H students.)*
4. Remove an unused telephone line hanging loosely from the building. *(Answer: Yes)*
5. Replace some boards on the front of the building with signs for AgriLife, WCMGA, and 4H. *(Answer: Unfortunately, there is no budget left for this fiscal year. AgriLife will review at the end of the year for possible "leftover" funds.)*
6. Install window boxes at the front of the building for MGs to maintain with flowers. *(Answer: Yes, but they need to be free-standing and not affixed to the building.)*
7. Install a sprinkler/irrigation system. *(Answer: It would be best to start a conversation from the MGs to the County Commissioner Court/City to possibly proceed with a sprinkler system at the office.)*

So, this could be observed to be an overly aggressive wish list or a great starting point! We chose the high road and began immediately on the projects that were a firm "yes." We immediately realized that we should be careful what we wish for.

It was easy to move the crosstie that had been run over multiple



Ken and Carolyn West and James Musser building the compost bin at the Extension office. Photo by Michelle Musser

times. Plans are in place to power wash the awnings over the flower beds when the spring pollen is finished. The disconnected phone wires that were hanging on the building are gone.

The Mussers and the Wests built the compost bin. They constructed an 8' x 8' x 4' bin using donated wood and the filling process has begun! Using the lasagna method with cardboard, we added chicken manure, cow manure, leaves, brush, and coffee grounds. Our target was to get an early start on the composting and to use it in the gardens at the AgriLife

Extension office site. Plus, we believe there will be plenty to share with other project sites, if needed.

Speaking of chicken manure, it was donated by Victoria Settle. If you have not experienced her chicken empire, you are missing something. I contacted Victoria when we completed the construction and asked her if she had "extra" chicken waste. My husband and I had a great time learning the names of the chickens, the types of chickens, colors of the eggs, how to build an ideal chicken house and, yes, how chickens mate. What an afternoon!



MG 2020 class members, Carolyn West, Michele Musser, and Nancy McDonald began by wetting the cardboard and preparing to add compost materials to the new compost bin. Photo by Kathy Goodman

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Extension Office Project (Continued from page 6)

We left with a large amount of manure mixed with wood chips. Victoria usually sells her chicken waste, but she was so kind to donate some to our project!

Three flower beds at one end of the AgriLife building were contributed by the MG Class of 2019. There are two water troughs filled with flowers. Gray's Nursery donated some bulbs to Michele Musser to add to the beds and they are now planted awaiting spring. Kathy Goodman and her granddaughter, AnnaLaura, planted some bluebonnets shared from the Hawkins City Park flowerbeds. Thank you, Ann Reynolds!

A big project in the planning stage is the addition of two window boxes at the front entrance of the building. Nancy McDonald has taken the lead on designing the boxes which must be free-standing. Ideas have been discussed for structure, liners, and irrigation methods with a goal of completion in time to plant for the early season. Nancy has completed a large amount of research and we are excited to see this project come to fruition.

The gardeners typically meet each Thursday morning at 9 a.m. to maintain the existing beds and work on new projects. Without a doubt, a lot of fun is mixed in with a lot of work. It has been rewarding to work together with other volunteers!

The remaining ideas and projects will be addressed as time allows and feasibility is proven. But there is a certain fact, the volunteers from the Class of 2020 are energetic and committed to doing our part to make our projects successful.



AnnaLaura Sharker and Carolyn West in front of the flower beds at the Extension office. Photo by Kathy Goodman

We are proud to attach signs that proclaim, "Contributed by the Master Gardener Class of 2020" to each project.

We encourage 2020 MG Class and other members to join us on Thursday mornings, grow friendships, share your talents, and earn some volunteer hours!

Kathy Goodman: Gardening — a Way to Connect and Inspire

This January we were blessed by a visit from our 12-year-old granddaughter, AnnaLaura Sharker. She was with us for a week, so I planned a few activities to keep her from being too bored by sitting around the house with two old folks. I wanted to give AnnaLaura a glimpse into gardening, volunteering, and hopefully plant a seed of the love of plants. So, I took her with me to work in the Hawkins City Park and the AgriLife Extension Office flowerbeds.

At the Hawkins City Park, the Texas bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*) were so thick that Ann Reynolds had asked that someone volunteer to transplant some to the area beneath the city park's sign. For some time, the base of the sign has contained just white rock and a stray couple of bluebonnets that were doing quite well. Since AnnaLaura has young knees and lots of energy, I thought that would be a great outdoor activity for us to share.

I dug up and separated the thick clumps of bluebonnets. Then, AnnaLaura planted them in the rocks. She had to cut through



AnnaLaura helped transplant bluebonnets at the Extension Office project in Quitman.

the landscape fabric and move rocks to plant them. There were so many extra plants that I wanted to share some with the AgriLife Extension Office project. So, the next day AnnaLaura and I planted several at the Extension Office project.

There were even some bluebonnets left over that AnnaLaura got to take home with her. There is nothing like getting free healthy plants to reward a person who is volunteering.

At home, for another gardening project, I showed AnnaLaura how to do winter sowing in milk jugs. She picked a few seeds from my stash. Then, we worked together to plant them in the jugs.

AnnaLaura was excited to have plants to take home. I believe that

she has an increased interest in gardening now. Maybe she'll be a future Master Gardener!

Reference: For winter sowing instructions, see <https://thereidhomestead.com/seed-starting-101-winter-sowing/>

Lin Grado: The Perils of Propagation

Just before the first freeze of the year, I take cuttings from all of my marginally-hardy perennials (zone 8 and warmer). I take cuttings just in case the mother plant doesn't make it through the winter. At times this seems like a fool's errand, especially since I don't have a greenhouse.

Cuttings should be taken from healthy, actively-growing plants – generally from summer through early autumn. However, I take these cuttings just before the first freeze, when the perennial is winding down for the year – not the optimal time. Strike one.

One of the secrets to successful rooting of cuttings is to “stick” them quickly – that means get the cutting prepped and into the potting mix as soon as possible. However, before the frost I may have two or three buckets of cuttings. So, they're not all getting done the same day. Strike two.

Cuttings also need high humidity – most professional growers have mist systems. I don't even have a greenhouse, so my cuttings must be rooted in my house. The heated air can dry out a pot in no time flat and a dry root is a dead root. Strike three.

Finally, my house is quite dark – large overhangs and pine trees limit the sun coming in the windows. The best I can provide indoors is bright light. I also keep it kind of chilly – no more than 63 degrees. Cold and dark - can I have strikes four and five?

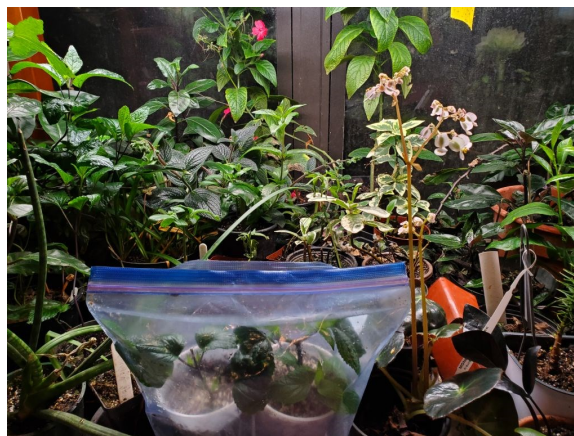


Seedlings in a grow box

With all these strikes, you would think I'd have no luck with fall cuttings – but I've learned to adapt so I can have some measure of success. Since I don't expect a great percentage of cuttings to root, I start with a greater number of cuttings. This approach in itself presents other issues – both from the time it takes to prepare the cuttings and the space they need in the house. Pots can take up a lot of room, so I either stick many cuttings in a forsythe pot (the self-watering pot you made in intern training) or I use 16-oz. clear cups with drainage holes added – inexpensive and a small footprint.

Reference: I used these rooting cups as an inspiration: <http://www.rootcups.com/>

I place the pots or cups in plastic tubs and an old aquarium as rooting boxes to keep the humidity around my plants. To mini-



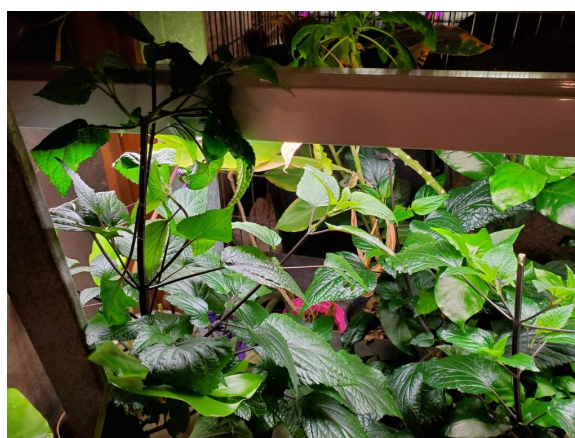
Cuttings under LED shop lights

mize fungal issues, I use a porous medium – potting soil mixed with perlite two to one. I fight off the chill by using a heat mat to provide some warmth to the cuttings. I'm a big fan of LED shop lights or grow lights on timers, to brighten even the darkest corner of my room. I also have some cuttings – hardwood such as angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia suaveolens*) and Confederate rose (*Hibiscus mutabilis*), and softwood such as firespike (*Odontonema cuspidatum*), syngonium (*Syngonium*), and mona lavender (*Plectranthus hybrid*) that I leave in water for most of the winter. I pot those up once it starts to get warm.

Sometimes I have early success and my cuttings get out of control. For example, I rooted some purple salvia (*Salvia dorrii*) and they got too large. So, after moving them around to the tallest area under lights I still had to cut them back to fit. Of course, I had cuttings and rooted them too. So now I have clones of my clones in my room – is this what it's like to be obsessed?

My early winter propagation isn't limited to cuttings. Sometimes I start seeds at the beginning of winter. I start seeds at just the right time by starting with the last freeze date and counting backward. I can also winter-sow seeds that are appropriate for that technique.

Reference: See more information on winter sowing here: [http://www.wintersown.org/How to Winter Sow.html](http://www.wintersown.org/How_to_Winter_Sow.html)



Overgrown cuttings had to be trimmed

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Linda Timmons: Shade Gardening Texas Style

Most gardeners don't plan to garden in the shade. When we plan our gardens we're told to choose a spot with plenty of sun. At the Wildscape we started out with a blank slate. No trees and no shade. Fifteen years later we have several shady spots and the accompanying challenge of shade gardening in Texas.

Most shade-loving plants also prefer moist conditions and moderate temperatures. In Wood County we're blessed with an average of 45" of rain per year. But most of that rain comes in the winter. Our gardens often suffer through 90 to 100 degree days and no rain for weeks on end in the summer. Not exactly moist and moderate. Most of the plants you'll find suggested on the shade-loving plant lists require superhuman efforts to stay alive and still they probably won't thrive.

Choosing plants for Texas shade is a challenge but there are excellent candidates. Bulbs are a great choice for under deciduous trees. They prefer winter rain and dry soil in the summer. Most bulbs that we use in our home gardens are heirlooms and pass-a-longs. Two Texas native bulbs that we use at the Wildscape are white rain lilies (*Cooperia pedunculata*) and copper lilies (*Habranthus tubispatus*). The rain lilies bloom in the summer usually two or three days after a rain. The copper lilies are the short, deep-yellow flowers alongside Wood County roads in late summer.

For spring blooms, the native perennial Hinckley's golden columbine (*Aquilegia hinckleyana*) provides interesting yellow



Hinckley's golden columbine

spurred blooms. Columbines have the added advantage of lacy evergreen foliage. About the time the columbines stop blooming, yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) starts. Yarrow's white blooms stand out in the shade and the ferny dark green foliage is attractive year-around. At the Wildscape we grow white yarrow in full shade and full sun. In full sun it blooms more freely.

Another shade tolerant late spring, early summer bloomer is the lyreleaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*). This perennial salvia has one to two-foot-tall stalks with light to dark lilac flowers. The attractive leaves are lyre shaped with burgundy veining. Many lyreleaf salvia cultivars have solid burgundy leaves. This salvia freely re-seeds so it is better used in a woodland or unstructured garden. Gregg's mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*) is a summer to fall blooming butterfly magnet. At the Wildscape we grow this blue flowered perennial in a spot with morning sun and afternoon shade.

Oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) is a wonderful shade tolerant shrub. It has white flowers in the spring that dry on the bush to a soft pink. In the fall the leaves turn red and hold on until late winter. The shrub grows to about 6 foot tall and wide, so give it plenty of room.

Reference: For more ideas of plants that grow in Texas shade, visit the Wildscape at the Mineola Nature Preserve or check out this document at Texas A&M Water University: <https://wateruniversity.tamu.edu/media/1084/shade-gardening-final-6-17.pdf>

The Perils of Propagation (Continued from page 8)

I'm a somewhat careless gardener, so I occasionally find some seeds stored on the trays under my plants. Those seeds are already sprouted from the moisture around them. Their roots and cotyledon are bursting through the seed coat, screaming to be planted. So in a pot they go. Once the leaves break the soil surface, I place them right underneath a grow light to give them the best chance.

I also collect seeds in the fall that must be planted fresh – seeds like Formosa or Philippine lily (*Lilium formosanum*), rain lily (*Zephyranthes*), and oxblood lily (*Rhodophiala bifida*). In fact, this year was the first time that my pink oxblood lilies set seed and I wanted to start them. To start them, I floated the seeds in water till I saw a root and a shoot. Then, I planted them in berry boxes as mini-greenhouses.

Reference: This website describes the process of floating amaryllis (*Amaryllidaceae*) seeds: <https://garden.org/ideas/view/cwhitt/2839/Propagating-Amaryllis-Seeds-by-Floating/>

Once the plants outgrew their little greenhouses, I cut the top off the clamshell container and they took a spot in an aquarium under grow lights.

While I may face many perils, I still cherish the success I had with my fall propagation. With the cold weather that was putting a hurt on my plants this winter, I think I'll be glad that I had a head start on filling the gaps in my garden. That is – once spring finally gets here.

Starting Fig Cuttings

I wrote about the difficulty of winter softwood cuttings from perennials. However, winter also is a perfect time to start some hardwood cuttings from roses, shrubs, or trees.

If you know someone who pruned a fig (*Ficus sycamorus*) tree, you may want to try your hand at cuttings. See this website for the best writeup: <https://www.figcuttings.com/p/how-to-root-fig-cuttings.html>

Betty Stark: Wonderful World of Sweet Potatoes

The other day I was looking for an Aggie Horticulture video on Facebook and came across a video about sweet potatoes. I was fascinated!

The sweet potato, which is in the morning glory family, is believed to have originated in Central or South America at least 5,000 years ago. It is one of the oldest vegetables known to man. Christopher Columbus saw native people in Central America and the Caribbean growing the crop. He enjoyed them so much that he took some back to Europe on his fourth and final voyage.

Sweet potatoes are the same as yams and sweet potatoes are not potatoes. A potato is a tuber and sweet potatoes are roots and are propagated by a "slip." A slip is a sweet potato sprout. In early February, sweet potato slips can be started in water or in soil.

Starting Slips in Soil

Starting slips in soil is a quicker method. If using sweet potato from a store, buy an organic one as it is less likely to have been treated. To start slips using an aluminum pan, put some drainage holes in the bottom and add some soil. Place the sweet potato lengthwise in the potting soil and bury it half way. Keep the soil moist and in a warm place or on top of a heat mat.

Starting Slips in Water

Starting sweet potato in water is like starting an avocado pit. Put toothpicks around the middle of the potato and put it in a jar/glass (canning jars work well). Adjust your water amount and place the jar/glass in a warm, sunny spot. Place the rooting end of the potato in the water. The rooting end tapers and has

small roots and the other end is rounder. Roots form below and leafy shoots form on top. Maintain the water level and replenish it when needed.

In both cases, when the sprouts have reached 5 to 6 inches, snap them from the point where they join the tuber. DO NOT CUT the slip. They must be torn from the tuber. Put these in water to form more roots. In 7 to 10 days the roots should appear. At this point you can pot them like any other seed start.

When to Plant

It's time to plant when your soil is ready and all danger of frost has passed. Plant slips will not survive a frost. An ideal slip is 8 to 10 inches tall and has at least 5 leaves, a fat stem, and healthy roots.

Unlike most vegetables, sweet potatoes DO NOT do better with lots of organic material added to the soil. They like loose sandy soil. Two to three weeks before planting, sprinkle lime and a small amount of fertilizer over the soil. Plant as soon as frost is over and water thoroughly.

Sweet potatoes grow well in a variety of containers and their vines can be trained to climb a trellis.

When to Harvest

After about 110 days, check your crop. If you have potatoes, dig your crop when the soil is dry. Be gentle with your new sweet potatoes. DO NOT wash them or brush the soil from the root. Spread your potatoes on newspaper and let them dry for 3 to 4 hours. After they have cured they can be stored like other potatoes.

Betty Stark: Zany Zinnias

I think I have a quirky way of looking at things! I would rather grow and nurture perennials than bother with annuals, since perennials keep growing for years. But I had a pleasant surprise last summer and fall when I thought all had been harvested from my garden. A friend had given me zinnia (*Zinnia*) seeds and I decided to throw them in the garden for the heck of it.

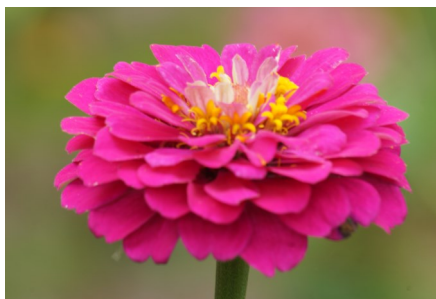
If you are looking for flowers for your butterflies and bees you will want to plant zinnias. They ended up being a beautiful annual worth just a little time.

Zinnias are warm weather plants that love high heat, which makes them perfect for our climate. There are almost 25,000 species and colors including red, yellow, pink, orange, violet, white, and lime green. The color combinations can be quite spectacular.

Plants are grown in full sun and they like well-draining soil that's on the sandy side and slightly acidic. Fertilize them lightly

and deadhead tall varieties for more blooms. If it is too wet, they can develop powdery mildew. If this occurs, discard the plants in late summer and replant them for fall blooming.

Amazingly, I could cut new blooms almost every day and enjoy their wonderful colors indoors. To prolong their freshness indoors, cut 1/4 inch from the bottom of the stem while holding them under water to keep air from entering the stem. (That's an old florist trick.)



Double zinnia. Photo by Kathy Goodman

In the vase, you can use commercial flower preservative in the water. Home gardeners use one or two crushed aspirin, a tablespoon of lemon juice, a pinch of sugar, or a few drops of bleach. Each treatment is supposed to add a bit of acid for better metabolism and to slow the growth of mold and bacteria in the water.

I hope you enjoy your zany zinnias as much as I have enjoyed mine.

Betty Stark: Christmas Gift Plants—After the Holidays

You may have received a plant for Christmas and are wondering, now that the holidays are over, what do I do with this plant? Plants can be the perfect Christmas gift and here are some easy ways to grow and maintain them. If you received any of these plants for Christmas, I hope this article encourages you to grow them year-round.

Poinsettias

Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are native to Mexico and were first cultivated for medicinal purposes. They have become popular Christmas decorations. The dark green leaves are also the colored flowers, which are forced to turn bright colors.

To continue their growth after the holidays, remove the holiday wrapper from the pot and fertilize every two weeks with an all-purpose fertilizer. Place the plants in a south-facing window, but not touching the windowpane. Water when the soil feels dry and let excess water completely drain out in the sink for about an hour. When the weather gets warm you can plant poinsettias in your garden. The pot should be totally submerged underground. Bring your plant inside in the fall after repotting it into a 2-inch larger pot.

Remember that poinsettias are poisonous. The white milky sap is especially poisonous to pets and children. Make sure you keep pets and children away from the plant and be sure to discard any dropped leaves.

Rosemary

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) can be purchased all year. It is a woody stemmed herb that grows in well-drained soil. It also has been used for medicinal purposes. For example, rosemary oil is very soothing in reducing stress. Best of all it is fragrant and can be shaped into the likeness of a small Christmas tree or other botanical hedge type shape.

After the holidays, rosemary leaves/needles can be used as a seasoning, fresh or dried. Put a sprig under the skin of a whole chicken or in the cavity. It adds flavor to meats and soups. Rosemary can be planted outside and needs full sun and well-drained soil. Fertilize in the spring with an all-purpose fertilizer. You can cut sprigs from it all year long.

Amaryllis

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) bulbs typically appear in stores in November. A single bulb can be purchased in garden centers and they also come in kit form. A kit typically includes a bulb, pot, and planting medium. To get an amaryllis to blossom for Christmas, follow the planting instructions in the kit. The bulb needs 4 to 6 weeks for full growth to blooming stage. After it has bloomed, let the green leaves die back on their own as this makes food/nutrition go back into the bulb for future growth.

The bulb can be planted outside in your garden. Amaryllis bulbs can be left dormant in a cool dry place over the summer and replanted the next year allowing 4 to 6 weeks for blooming.

Christmas Cactus

There are varieties called Easter and Thanksgiving cactus, but the most popular is the Christmas cactus (*Zygocactus truncatus*). The leaves are flat and segmented (divided).

There are a variety of ways to get your Christmas cactus to bloom. One way is to give it 12 hours of darkness every night for 6 to 8 weeks before Christmas, so you have to do a little timing.

Another way to produce budding is to put it in a cold room or a cold window. I have always had great success doing that. The drop in temperature brings on the buds. When it is blooming, water it when the top 1 to 2 inches of soil is dry. You can pot it in regular potting mix. If you receive a blooming plant, enjoy the flowers.



The leaves identify the various types of cactus.

Cyclamen

Cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*) is a plant that appears in the winter holiday season. It is a tuberous perennial that dies back during summer and then regrows each fall. It has upside down flowers and comes in a variety of colors such as white, pink, purple, and red.

The flowers are showy and do well in bright filtered sunlight. They like cool temperatures and well-drained moist soil. If the temperatures in your house are too high, the plant will begin to yellow and the flowers will fade rapidly. Make sure the plant has excellent drainage. Water the plant from below and do not allow the leaves or flowers to get wet. Soak the soil thoroughly and let the pot drain in the sink.

Fertilize every couple of months with a water-soluble fertilizer mixed at half strength. When the leaves and flowers drop off, the plant is not dead, it is just dormant. Stop watering it and put the plant in a dark, cool spot. Let it sit for two months. Once its dormant period, soak the soil by setting the plant in a tub of water for an hour. Drain excess water. If the tuber seems crowded in the pot, it is time to repot. Once the leaves start to grow, resume normal care and it should re-bloom soon.

Paperwhite Narcissus

Paperwhite narcissus (*Narcissus papyraceus*) have long stems with fragrant, delicate white flowers. Plant the bulbs when you get them. Place the bulbs in a shallow dish 2 to 3 inches deep with the roots amongst small pebbles or glass beads to help anchor the bulbs upright. Add water to the base of the bulb. The bulbs will rot if the water level is too high.

Check them often to make sure they have sufficient water because in cold months the air is dry and evaporation can be a problem. As the stems get tall, use bamboo sticks and twine to support them. When they finish blooming, plant them outdoors. Note that it may take up to three years to re-bloom.

Barbara Williams: When, How, and Why to Grow Loofahs

Howdy ya'll, I'm Barbara Williams (WCMG class of 2017) and I appreciate all of the knowledge I've gained while being a part of this association and I'm extremely grateful for all the friends I've gotten to know!

Here's my experience with growing loofahs.

March 27, 2017 - I cleaned out around a dead oak on our property and leaned an old gate against it. I dug out a shallow trench in front of it and filled it with Mel's mix (1/3 peat moss, 1/3 perlite, and 1/3 compost). Then I drizzled seaweed water on top and watered it well.

March 28, 2017 - I fluffed up the soil, planted loofah seeds one inch apart and watered them in. I kept nine plants.

I started getting loofahs in late July with a bunch more in early August.

September 13-17,

2017 - I harvested 13 and figured out 1 Tbsp. + ½ oz. = 100 seeds. (I counted quite a few and then decided to measure differently. Each loofah had approx. 500-600 seeds.)

September 19, 2017 - A branch fell off with around 12 still green loofahs.

October 29, 2017 - A hard freeze took out the rest of the crop.

The above information was from my notes. I'm so glad it was reinforced in class to take and keep notes for the future.

Coming across these notes last year while I was searching for something else made me realize the reason I didn't have any loofah's mature the previous two years is because I planted in May instead of March.

So last year, I planted in March (only five plants this time) and would've been able to harvest this group if only my mom and auntie hadn't decided to "help" me out with my garden.

While the dead oak made for a beautiful backdrop, in reality it wasn't a good idea.

The loofah's were too heavy and broke some of the branches. Not to mention we could not get to the loofahs at the top. (We had to wait for the wind to blow them out over a couple of years.)

You'll definitely want a trellis or a fence to grow them on. Just remember they're annuals and you'll be cleaning (or burning) the dead vines off your supports in winter.

The first round of flowers don't usually produce fruit for me. There's a single female flower with a group of around five male buds nearby. She blooms and one of the males blooms each day (dropping off at night) until they're done. Then she either makes a loofah or falls off herself. The ground is littered with yellow flowers, very pretty once you realize the plant is okay.

Harvest loofahs when most of the skin is tan to dark brown, with just a little black. If you wait till it's completely black, it'll

be hard to peel. When you pick it up, it should crinkle under light pressure, its weight is very light and you should be able to hear seeds rattle around if you shake it.

Cut off the tip with garden shears and either run your thumb up the side or slice with the shears and then peel it off of the spongy part (kind of like a banana). I rinsed mine off with a hose attachment set to stream over a large strainer my husband had on top of a 40ish gallon trash can. That way I could save the seeds.

Important to note...WEAR GLOVES!!! The loofah is a sponge used to exfoliate and while my hands felt super smooth after the first batch, I realized they were getting closer to raw a few loofahs into the next round.

Once they are cleaned and most seeds are



Area prepped and loofah started growing.



Loofah vines climbing high in the dead oak.



Female bloom



Male buds

(Continued on page 13)

When, How and Why to Grow Loofahs (Continued from page 12)

out, lay the loofahs on a tray in the sun for several days (flipping them over once a day). Spread the seeds out on a tray and leave them outside to dry out as well (stirring once a day). Once dry, you can rub the seeds between your hands to take the film off of them. They look a lot like pumpkin or squash seeds... *they taste like hairspray.* I tried several methods I found online and improvised to roast them, but never found a recipe I cared for.

Mom and auntie harvested these loofahs too early.

If you're wondering how I know what hairspray tastes like, I have an older sister who sprayed her hair about the same time I would walk by. Coincidence? Maybe.



Prepared loofah and seeds

Wondering what to do with your abundance?

I found a great article online... *5 Incredible Uses For This Simple Plant* by Jenifer Jost written April 19, 2014.

Reference: <https://www.offthegridnews.com/how-to-2/5-incredible-uses-for-this-simple-plant/>

Here are the high points:

- Food Source** - When the loofahs are babies (other websites say 5 to 6 inches long), they can be used as substitutes for okra, zucchini, cucumber, and squash. She also describes pickling and using the seeds.
- Kitchen Scrubbers** - Cut into 2-inch wide sections for use in washing dishes (make sure you let them dry out in between uses). She also has instructions for making a pot scrubber out of the sections using baking soda, dish soap and essential oil.
- Bath Products** - Cut into 4 to 6 inch sections to use in the shower. Make sure the loofah is wet first and use caution on sensitive skin. She suggests cutting out the inside so you can slip your hand in it for better control. Jenifer also has instructions to make body scrubs and an alternative to a pumice stone. (I forgot about this one, it's going on my to-do list.)
- Tough-to-Clean Solutions** - Dried loofah scraps, at least one inch by one inch, can be dipped in gasoline to clean greasy car parts, tools and spills. She also has instructions for an alternative to salting an icy driveway or walkway.
- Starter Logs and Kindling** - When picked too soon or they aren't formed properly, you can throw them on the wood pile before you peel and clean them. (*Smells like hairspray to me when they burn, but it's an effective way to use them.*) She goes into more detail about prepping for fire starters.

I highly recommend reading the full article for the details!

Synopsis on When, How and Why to Grow Loofahs

- Plant outside in May.
- Make sure you have a trellis or fence for the vine to grow on.
- Don't be discouraged when the first round of flowers don't produce.
- Harvest when dark brown, light (not heavy), and you can hear the seeds rattle inside.
- Wear gloves when you work with them so you don't exfoliate to the raw stage.
- Wash the gunk off and let dry in the sun for several days.
- Share with friends, keep some for personal use, and/or sell at a Farmer's Market (25¢ an inch was on the low side).

Thanks for reading my article and if you would like some loofah seeds (I still have quite a few.), let me know and I'll get you some in time to plant this year.



Fruit is ready to pick when tan to dark brown.



As you read our WCMGA newsletter, you learn about:

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- Garden projects
- Advanced training speakers at educational forums
- Classroom instruction for county ISDs
- Newspaper educational articles written by Master Gardeners
- Community outreach events
- Resources such as our website and Facebook pages

Please send newsletter articles, suggestions, and interesting information to Kathy Goodman at kmgoodman0807@gmail.com.

Note: You can count time spent writing articles as volunteer hours. Please understand that all articles may be edited to fit the newsletter style or for spacing needs.

Online with WCMGA

MG Wood Works Newsletter

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Website

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Sunshine

Know of a member who needs a get well, warm thought, or sympathy card? Contact Elaine Porter at 361-319-7300 or porterpettus@gmail.com.

Volunteer Hours

<http://texas.volunteersystem.org> Click the link. The sign in page for the Volunteer System opens. Before logging in, right-click on the page and save it to favorites, bookmark it, or create a shortcut to your desktop. Please enter your hours. If you need help contact Peggy Rogers.

Associate Roster

You can find all email addresses and contact information for other Master Gardeners in the Volunteer System.

Please update your profile in the Roster! Check your listing to be sure your contact information is up-to-date. Have you uploaded your photo?

To become a Master Gardener: Contact the Wood County Extension Office at 903-763-2924