

# MG Wood Works



March/April 2023

## Inside This Issue

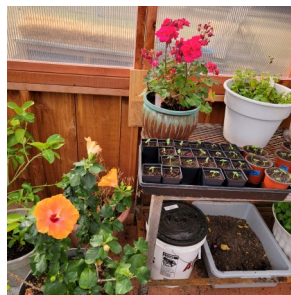
2023 WCMGA Information	<a href="#">2</a>
Flower Arranging Demonstration	<a href="#">2</a>
Master Gardener on Vacation	<a href="#">3</a>
Quitman Public Library Project Provides Opportunity to Learn	<a href="#">4</a>
Emory Projects Planning and Educating	<a href="#">5</a>
Salvaging Muscadine Grape Vines	<a href="#">6</a>
Using Clover Cover Crop in a Raised-Bed Vegetable Garden	<a href="#">7</a>
Introducing the WCMG 2023 Training Class	<a href="#">8</a>
Plant a Bulb, Plant a Story	<a href="#">10</a>
Growing Potatoes in East Texas	<a href="#">10</a>
Keystones and Caterpillars	<a href="#">11</a>
What's Going On In My Garden?	<a href="#">12</a>
Straw Bale Gardening	<a href="#">13</a>
WCMGA Projects Map	<a href="#">14</a>
Food Pantries for Vegetable Donations	<a href="#">15</a>
WCMGA Information and Educational Opportunities	<a href="#">16</a>

## Barb Williams: President's Letter

Howdy y'all and welcome to our busy season!

I've been having a lot of fun in my greenhouse potting up starts from cuttings, dividing and repotting my Siam Tulip bulbs, bumping up my seedlings started inside, and just enjoying the flowers I've gotten to see in the middle of winter!

I have my onions in the ground. I am trying out growing potatoes in a grow bag using a layer



technique for more spuds ([see Betty's article on page 10](#)) and have re-sown the radishes, lettuce, and sugar snap peas that didn't make it through the hard freeze.

The raised beds my husband built me for

tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers were seriously low in soil this year so I'm going to use the straw bale gardening technique again. For more details, see the [straw bale gardening article on page 13](#).

I'm interested in foraging so I'm super excited to host our April 20 meeting at my place. We'll have a short business meeting. Then, an



amazing young woman, Rebecca Staggs, will teach us about safety in foraging and show us samples of what's edible and available locally. Afterward, she'll guide a walk about for those who would like to join her. Others can check out the greenhouse or lounge by the pool (of course, you can leave when you're ready).

I'm also excited about our new Lunch and Learn series that will be offered to the public at the AgriLife Extension Office on the fourth Thursday of each month! I will be teaching Vegetable Gardening 101 on April 27.



A huge thank you to those that came out and helped us clean out the WCMGA stuff in the back room of the Extension Office in January! The space looks so much better. Many hands really do make light work!

Please feel free to reach out to me whenever you'd like. I respond quickest to text messages. (505) 321-2817

Peace, Love and Joy!

Wood Works Staff  
Kathy Goodman, Editor  
Jenna Nelson, Proofreader

TEXAS A&M  
AGRILIFE  
EXTENSION

## Upcoming Events

**March 16: WCMGA Meeting: Life Doesn't Start With the Seed, It Starts With the Soil by Steve Aker**

**March 23: Lunch and Learn: Raised Beds and Hügelkultur**, Extension Office in Quitman, from 12 to 1. Bring your lunch and drink. The public is welcome.

**April 20: WCMGA Meeting: Foraging by Rebecca Staggs**. Meeting will be hosted at Barb William's home.

**April 27: Lunch and Learn: Vegetable Gardening 101**, Extension Office in Quitman, from 12 to 1. Bring your lunch and drink. The public is welcome.

## 2023 WCMGA Officers



Barb Williams, President



Carolyn West, Vice President



May Sandison, Treasurer



Marty DaSilva, Secretary

### WCMGA Directors

Gayle Mullinax, Director

Keith Mullinax, Director

Debbie Latham, Alternate Director

Carolyn West, Alternate Director

**Note:** WCMGA members can find an individual's phone number and email address on the Member Roster under the General Information menu on the Wood County Master Gardener Volunteer Management System. <https://vms.texasmg.org>

### Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent, Wood County



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### WCMGA Project Chairs

Emory City Park and Sandy Creek Park, Lannette Beaver

Trainee Class, Emily Castillo

Hawkins City Park and Library, Ann Reynolds

Mineola Nature Preserve, Linda Timmons

Phenology-Nature Watch, Jessie Mellon

Quitman Public Library, Jan Whitlock

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office, Martha Maurits

Winnsboro Library, Bob Bauerschmidt and Patt Bauerschmidt

Wood County Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, Lin Grado

### Support Positions

Emails, Keith Mullinax

WCMGA Facebook Private Group, Linda Timmons

Newsletter, Kathy Goodman

Sunshine, Elaine Porter

Volunteer Management System, Linda Timmons

Website, Keith Zimmerman

## Flower Arranging Demonstration

by Kathy Goodman

Karen Young who owns Country Flowers and Gifts in Emory, Texas, gave an amazing flower arranging demonstration at the January WCMGA meeting. Her arrangement was big and beautiful. At the end of the demonstration, she graciously

donated the beautifully colorful arrangement as a door prize. Mike Ferguson was the lucky winner. We thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated Karen's presentation.

Her business location is: 883 N Texas St., Emory, TX

Her website: <https://www.emorycountryflowers.com/>



Karen Young demonstrates her flower arranging skills.



Carolyn West thanking Karen for her demonstration.



Karen with the lucky winner, Mike Ferguson.



## Master Gardener on Vacation

by Susan Jarrell

What do Master Gardeners do when on vacation? Critique the gardens, of course!

On a recent trip to Greece, I was drawn to the beautiful potted plants, such as bougainvillea, schefflera, orange and lemon trees, rosemary, eucalyptus, fennel, and, of course, grapevines and olive trees.

In that area, most plants were in containers because of the volcanic ash soil across the island. However, some plots of land were tilled and enriched. In those areas, there were pistachios, fig trees, and grapes. Because of the windy conditions, the grapes were kept like low bushes.

Houses in the villages were so close together that many gardens were limited to a couple of potted plants on a small entrance or on a patio. I was amazed at the wild geraniums that grow between huge lava rocks or limestone with no fancy fertilizer!

In my opinion, Santorini had the most beautiful gardens. Over 2.5 million visitors arrive on the island in the spring and summer so they are treated to lush vegetation in and around the restaurants and hotels.

It is truly paradise!



*Beautiful pink bougainvillea makes a big decorative splash of color in Santorini.*



*A sample of the landscaping at the Eastern Orthodox monasteries of Meteora in the mountains of Greece. The landscaping is maintained by the monks serving at the monasteries.*



*A decorative nook in Santorini is a beautiful example of decorating a small space.*



# Quitman Public Library Project Provides Opportunity to Learn about Texas Super Stars

by Jan Whitlock

I represent the Quitman Public Library Project under the direction of the WCMG Association and the Quitman Garden Club. These gardens are on the east and west sides of the Quitman Library on Goode Street in Quitman, Texas.



West garden at the Quitman Public Library

My history with gardening in Wood County began with my certification as a WCMG in the Class of 2011. It was during this same time frame that I joined the Quitman Garden Club. Both



West garden at the Quitman Public Library

of these experiences have led to education, friendships, and patience with the weather in East Texas.

The Quitman Public Library Gardens have been maintained by a few Quitman Garden Club members over the years. As with



West garden at the Quitman Public Library

any project, the volunteers change and the plants adapt to new caregivers and to companion trees maturing.

We are in the process of freshening up the landscape design by including a few more Texas Super Star plants. The inclusion of these new arrivals will begin an opportunity for local gardeners and library patrons to learn more about Texas Super Star plants.

We plan to add signage to assist in highlighting the new plant materials. These new additions will be included in brochures that will be located inside the library facility.

As time progresses, I plan to fill you in on some of the history surrounding the library and the creation of the garden areas.

Please join us in this renovation and rejuvenation project. We are currently working on Monday afternoons from 2 pm to 4 pm. As the temperatures begin to rise, we will continue with the Monday workday and change the time to the morning hours of 9 am to 11 am.



West garden at the Quitman Public Library



# Emory Projects Planning and Educating

*by Lannette Beaver*

Teresa Runion and I began our Master Gardener training in the Class of 2017. After doing some of our volunteer hours at the Wood County Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, we asked if we could work in Emory at the City Park. Clint Perkins, the Wood County extension agent at the time, agreed as long as Stephen Gowin, our Rains County extension agent, would oversee the project. (Rains County does not have a Master Gardener program.)

We began by talking to the Emory Development Corporation office which asked us to work up a proposal. With the help of some local advisers and Lin Grado, we presented the proposal and it was approved.

When we began, the circle beds were in terrible shape. Fortunately, Hooten's Lawn & Tree Service volunteered to rebuild two of the rock circles in the park. City workers moved the monument inside one of the circles and purchased soil and compost for us.

Teresa and I moved several nandinas to the center circle and pulled out the barberry around the birdbath. Friends and family members donated iris, daylilies, amaryllis, and paperwhites to plant around the birdbath and a small tree. Over the years the city purchased some shrubs and annuals. In addition, Hooten's Lawn & Tree Service donated annuals and mulch. The last two years we have used our budget money from the WCMGA program to purchase flats of annuals.

Our main problem has always been keeping the beds watered. Unfortunately, the water source is across the park road under a heavy metal lid. Accessing the water has been time consuming and somewhat dangerous. Thankfully, in 2022, the City of Emory hired a beautification employee who waters the park beds and other beds around town.

In 2021 we began working at Sandy Creek Park by cleaning around some of the trees and weeding around the Sandy Creek

sign. In 2022 volunteers began looking to improve one particular area of the park. After seeking additional advice, we drew up a plan and presented it to the Emory City Development Corporation. Once again, the city jumped on board. They graciously moved an existing metal arch, brought in soil, leveled the ground, moved the concrete benches inward, put down edging to create a bed, and installed a bridge painted to match the arch.

Master Gardeners then improved the soil in the beds and moved some of the existing plants, such as mums, daffodils, sedum, and rose bushes. We also planted new shrubs and perennials and donated zinnias and cannas from our homes. Unfortunately, last summer's heat and drought killed several of the new plants.

This year our focus is to educate the public by labeling the various plants in our beds. We would love to have you work with us the first Thursday of the month at 9 am.



*Emory City Park and Sandy Creek Park Continuing Improvements*

*Focusing on Education In 2023*





# Salvaging Muscadine Grape Vines

by Jessie Mellon

Our neighbor gifted us four large muscadine cultivars that he salvaged from an unwanted vineyard in Upshur County. I couldn't believe the size of the plants. They arrived strapped to the bed of a flatbed trailer and were piled higher than the cab.

The tangled mass of vines had been dug up with roots, trunk, and an unkempt canopy. They looked like hairy monsters.

As we dragged them into the back yard, I was overwhelmed by the job ahead. I had wanted to start one or two vines for home use, but when it rains, it pours. Here's what I have learned about propagating muscadines.

## Making Cuttings

Winter is the time to make cuttings from dormant grapevines. Although the plants may look dead, inspection of the cambium revealed a green ring. Suitable canes should be limber and may have a bronze color. These two criteria do not guarantee life; so we'll have to wait until spring to see if they have survived.

Cuttings should be 12 to 18 inches in length, have the diameter of a pencil, and have at least four nodes. Nodes are swelled areas along the length of the vine. An easy way to distinguish top from bottom is to make a diagonal cut with sharp sheers or a knife just below the node closest to the trunk. This is the bottom node. The top can be designated with a straight cut across the diameter of the vine.

## Planting the Cuttings

These cuttings should be planted as soon as possible. I was unable to plant mine right away; so I put the bottom node in a bucket of rainwater. To plant the cuttings, cover three of the nodes with soil and leave the fourth node above ground.

Over the winter the bottom cut will callus and roots will form from the underground nodes. Keep the soil moist around the cutting but not wet. Not all the cuttings will survive. Expect about a 10 percent mortality rate, so take more cuttings than you need.

Pinkish or fuzzy cinnamon-colored buds should swell on surviving cuttings in the spring. Be patient, but if you just can't stand the suspense, make a cut on a more mature vine. If the sap is rising, it should drip from the cut and you'll know that spring is on the way.

## Protecting the Cuttings

Deer love to browse on new growth; so protect your cuttings by fashioning a chicken wire cylinder about 3 to 4 inches in diameter and 24 inches tall. Place it upright over your cutting and secure it with a stake. This should protect your tender cuttings for the first year.

I planted the root balls of two of the vines because I learned that new canes can sprout from the base of an aged vine and may be encouraged if the main trunk is injured or has died. We'll see if they show life this coming spring. I'll keep you posted. In the meantime, I'll do some more research.



One of the huge salvaged muscadine grapevines

## For More Information

The following YouTube videos were informative and I hope you enjoy them as much as I did:

Growing Muscadine Grapes in Texas by Aggie Horticulture  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7R-989AHP4&t=1075s>

Another informative video that is not by Aggie Horticulture is: Pruning Grapevines in Wisconsin for Cold Climate By Wollersheim Winery & Distillery <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqhbpxvYg5A>

## Wood County Master Gardener Association Meetings

Third Thursday of Each Month

8:30 - 9 AM Visiting and Signing In  
 9 AM Meeting

First Assembly of God Church  
 909 E Goode St., Quitman, Texas

# Using Clover Cover Crop in a Raised-Bed Vegetable Garden

by Martha Maurits

A year ago last spring, during planting season, we had a motivating conversation with a neighbor who makes a living in agriculture. He shared that farmers were deeply concerned about the increasing expense of their synthetic nitrogen crop fertilizer. Prices were unprecedented due to rising natural gas costs used in its manufacturing and inflation.

Purchasing a 50-pound bag of 32-00-00 ammonium nitrate for our garden proved this true. Nitrogen is essential for plant and soil nutrition and crop success, and in general, synthetic fertilizer feeds the plant and organic fertilizer feeds the soil.

Growers were discussing using an organic cover crop such as crimson clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*) instead. A cool-season annual legume and member of the bean and pea family, this choice can be grown as green manure.

When planted in acreage, farmers expect a respectable result from the harvest. It can add from 100 to 150 pounds of nitrogen per acre back into the soil. Specifically growing a plant to add back into the field for improvement is why cover crops are called green manure and living mulch.

Crimson clover is one of a variety of options, and it has been used as a soil enhancer in our country since the mid-1800s. Maturing from 1 to 3 feet tall, its other names include Italian, scarlet, incarnate, and carnation clover.

You may be familiar with this showy spring plant hosting a deep red bloom. It flowers brilliantly in East Texas with wildflowers and is full of nectar, attracting European and native bees. A pollinator magnet, it makes an excellent companion plant for fruit and nut trees as well as corn and blueberries. Its fluffy blossoms host the pirate bug, a beneficial insect that feeds on agricultural pests.

After researching this green manure we wanted to try growing it to enhance our garden. We bought a five pound bag of non-GMO *Trifolium incarnatum* seeds for \$29. Its label described the plant as "having beautiful, vibrant flowers, quick growth, great erosion control, excellent cover crop, good till-in, green manure crop, protein rich forage crop, and excellent nitrogen fixing plant."

On October 17, 2022, we sowed our first clover, using a small amount of seeds, in two raised beds filled with light, organic planter soil. These plants prefer well-draining soil; so it was a perfect growing medium. With irrigation and sun they germinated and grew rapidly during our warm autumn days.

Crimson clover is distinctive from other clover because it grows and matures quickly, with a shallow, but strong tap root system. Sowing this plant in late summer allows it to become established here before cold weather.

Guides recommend planting in full to partial sun, spacing seeds 3 inches apart in rows with a 3-inch row gap, and planting the seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep. This crop cannot tolerate extreme heat or cold, preferring cool, humid weather. It will grow in Zones 4-10 and established plants are frost tolerant down to 0° F. Requiring regular water, it tolerates from 12 to 64 inches of

annual rain, but cannot survive in drought conditions.

Propagating is best in soil between 6 and 7 pH, it will grow in a range of 4.8 to 8.2 pH.

Exceeding expectations, our clover grew in thickly and thrived through at least three hard autumn frosts, right up until we experienced an arctic blast on December 22-23, 2022. During that episode it was completely overcome by cold conditions and succumbed to nature before reaching its mature bloom stage.

In retrospect, an earlier planting would have been better, allowing time for the plants to flower. For use as green manure, it is recommended to cut off all mature crimson clover blossoms BEFORE their red tops fade, because, once faded, they produce seeds, which drop and reseed. In Texas, this could become an invasive plant for that reason and should be managed by removing the flowers, using a weed whip, grass whip or manual hedge clippers.

Growing clover in raised beds can help prevent its invasive tendencies because of the manageable area. After removing the seed heads, the next step is turning everything under where it stands. The nitrogen-fixing nodules which develop along clover tap roots are much like the ones on a Texas bluebonnet, and they allow the plant to take nitrogen from the environment and feed it.

These amazing nodules add nitrogen fertility back into the soil when they are composted. After the freeze, we waited a week to determine if our clover was living. By then the plants were yellowing, mushy, and clearly not making a comeback. We turned the crop under with shovels to let the plant mass and roots decay during winter. Rain, sun, and periodic turning helps the biomass composting process and releases its nutrients in the ground before spring planting.

Our green manure nitrogen-fixing experiment using crimson clover required a container, purchasing seeds, planting them, watering, and turning them under.

Using this cover crop was a straightforward, organic option to boost fertility in raised beds. It can be done annually to enrich the planter contents after a soil-depleting gardening year. In addition, it can provide secondary and micronutrients not found in synthetic fertilizers and it is becoming more cost-competitive with synthetic fertilizers.

If food costs our farmers more to grow, our produce prices will increase. Using a nitrogen input such as crimson clover and raising some vegetables at home, rather than buying all greens at the market, can provide a budget savings for consumers.

It requires one's efforts and thinking outside the box, but gardens are living experiments and we enjoyed cultivating clover. Now is a great time to be creative both in raising provisions and in feeding soil for the joy of growing what we enjoy eating and to try to reduce our payments to and dependence upon others.

Our WCMGA classes and gardening networks provide places to learn and refine this very thing.



# Introducing the WCMG 2023 Training Class

by Emily Husmann Castillo

The Wood County Master Gardener 2023 Training Class kicked off on January 10. The class takes place every Tuesday from 8:30 am- 12:30 pm until the conclusion of the class, which is a tour of Blue Moon Nursery on May 2. The 2023 class is off to an awesome start with 17 new trainees!

Trainees have been learning about Texas Master Gardeners, the Wood County Master Gardener Association, VMS, WCMGA projects, botany, soil, and propagation so far! In addition to in class lectures, the trainees will be going on a handful of field trips later in the class.

The 2023 trainees have already started participating in the WCMGA and are looking forward to becoming Texas Master Gardeners! Allow me to introduce the 2023 WCMG trainees:

## Shauna Chapin

Shauna calls Winnsboro home and has been a resident of Wood County for the last three years. She has had a personal garden for 20 years and started a flower farm two years ago! Shauna is interested in becoming a Master Gardener for the useful training and to help give back to her community.



## Dana Childs



Dana is a resident of Quitman and has been living in Wood County for over four years. Her interest in becoming a Master Gardener stems from wanting to learn more about growing food and decorative plants, as well as giving back to her community.

She has always been interested in gardening and is an enthusiastic member of the 2023 class!

## Patsy Davila (No Photo Available)

Patsy has been in Wood County for two years and resides in Yantis. She first learned about the Master Gardener program from the Fannie Marchman Garden Club where she has volunteered to help with their garden tours and club plant sales. Patsy is looking forward to learning more about how to grow food for self-sufficiency!

## Kathy Durham



Kathy calls Emory home and has lived there for the past two years. She started gardening at the age of 12 in New York City and has continued to garden and create compost in some form or another ever since.

Kathy has been an active trainee already by helping out at the Extension Office storage room clean out, volunteering at WCMGA projects and attending monthly meetings.

## Scott Gilbreath



Scott has been in Wood County for five years and is located in Quitman. He has gardening experience in planting and growing fruits and vegetables.

Scott nearly was in the class three years ago, but ended up with a job instead and is now able to be a part of the class in his retirement!

## Kelly Ann Holden

Kelly Ann calls Holly Lake Ranch home and has been in Wood County for five years. She heard about the Master Gardener program through the Holly Lake Garden Club.

Kelly Ann has gardening experience with her home composting and flower garden.



## Nate Holden



Nate calls Holly Lake Ranch home and has been a resident of Wood County for five years.

He has experience managing 30 acres of church property, including a lawn, pond, and flower beds. Nate enjoys planting at home for the beauty and fresh vegetables!

## Connie Holliday

Connie has been a resident of Wood County for a little over a year and a half and calls Quitman home! She learned about the Wood County Master Gardener program through her good friend Kathy Goodman.

Connie loves to work outside and has been planting flowers all her life.



## Nicole Jenkins



Nicole has lived in Wood County for 40 years and calls Mineola home. She was interested in becoming a Master Gardener to participate in something she loves doing, learning more, giving back as well as being around other gardeners!

Nicole's gardening experience stems from what she has taught herself, learned from her dad, and learned by helping her husband with his lawncare company.



*Introducing the WCMG 2023 Training Class continued from Page 8*

**Brian Jones**



Brian resides in Emory. He has backyard gardening experience and has many fruit trees, roses, vegetables, and more on his property.

Brian is looking forward to learning more about gardening as well as helping others learn more about gardening through the Master Gardener program!

**Penney Ryan**



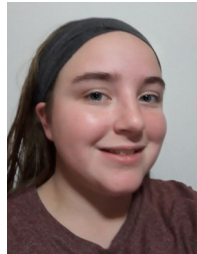
Penney is a resident of Point. She was interested in joining the Master Gardener program to gain knowledge through interaction with others and to learn from helping people.

Penney is also looking forward to the opportunity to meet people in the community while helping them!

**Brooke Jones**

Brooke resides in Emory. She has backyard gardening experience and is looking forward to learning how to improve her personal garden.

Brooke also wants to learn while helping others with their gardening through the Wood County Master Gardener program.



**Mimi Turbeville**

Mimi has lived in Wood County for a year and calls Mineola home. She has been a volunteer at the Wood County Arboretum and Botanical Garden which is where she first learned about the Master Gardener program.

She has experience with backyard gardening for the past 15 years and used to teach gardening to Kindergarten, first, and second grade.



**Linda Mahony**



Linda has been in Wood County for five years and lives in Quitman.

She has always enjoyed gardening, specifically with native plants.

She was interested in the Master Gardener program because of her enjoyment of gardening!

**Cindy Souser**



Cindy resides in Point. She has several gardens now, grows mostly vegetables, and tries to only garden organically.

She is looking forward to spending her time as a Master Gardener increasing her skills and knowledge and giving back to the community.

**Laura Palumbo (No Photo Available)**

Laura calls Winnsboro home and has been living in Wood County for more than two years. She has experience in home gardening and heard about the Master Gardener program through Suzanne Whitsell.

Laura has been enjoying the class for the useful training and newly learned skills and knowledge!

**Kandice Williamson**

Kandice is a resident of Canton. Over the years, she has had many vegetable gardens.

She is looking forward to growing her knowledge for personal use and for her community.



*Welcome  
Trainee Class of  
2023!*

## Plant a Bulb, Plant a Story

by Kathy Goodman

At the WCMGA meeting in February, Chris Wiesinger, the Bulb Hunter and owner of the Southern Bulb Company gave a lively presentation about bulbs native to our region. He said, "When you plant a bulb, you are planting a story." Long after you're gone, the bulbs will show you were there. He shared photos and stories about various amazing bulbs that thrive in this area. According to Chris, there is a bulb that blooms in every month. He recommends planting bulbs among your perennials, such as salvia and lantana. Cut the perennial down to a few inches in the winter. The bulb blooms will be beautiful in the spring before the perennials grow. When the flowers fade, the greenery of the bulbs won't distract from the perennials.



*The bulbs, lilies, and books sold out quickly to Master Gardeners who are ready to plant things.*



*The Oxblood or Schoolhouse Lily blooms August through October.*

*This circle of lilies shows where a tree once stood.*



You can learn more about the bulbs that Chris ships at the Southern Bulb Company website: <https://www.southernbulbs.com/>

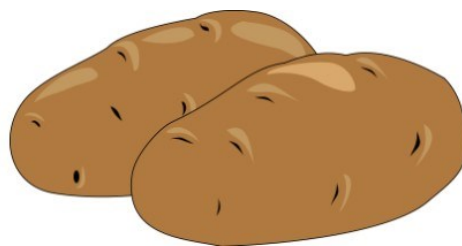
## Growing Potatoes in East Texas

by Betty Stark

There is nothing more fun and exciting to a gardener than digging up potatoes in the fall. After planting and caring for your plants all summer, it's a surprise to see what has developed underground.

The best varieties for our area are:

- Red Norland, which matures early and takes only 70 to 90 days to harvest. Norland is a good boiling potato. It's also good for French fries and potato chips.
- Red LaSoda which are good for roasting and mashing. From planting to harvesting is about 95 days.
- White Kenebec is a mid- to late-maturing white spud. They are good for steak fries, hash browns, chips, and hasselback potatoes.



Start planting February 2-16 for our zone according to the *Texas Gardener* magazine. You can purchase seed potatoes from Potts Feed Store in Quitman or Emory. They are also available at Grays Nursery on RT 69 in Mineola.

Do not use store bought potatoes as they may have been treated with a chemical that inhibits sprouting and will prevent them from growing.

Cut your seed potatoes into sections with two to four eyes (the little sprouts) on them. After I cut them, I lay them on

newspaper to let the cut area dry and form a thin callous. That will help with curbing disease and decay once planted in the ground. You can plant two to three weeks before the last frost as potatoes tolerate planting while the soil is still cool.

Fertilize your potatoes with a balanced plant food such as 10-10-10 when plants are about a foot tall. Mix in and water well. Keep plants well-watered all season.

To get a higher yield try one of the many container plantings but remember the pot needs to be deep. Fill the pot about 1/3 full with a 50/50 mix of garden soil and compost. Plant the potato sections 6 inches deep. Place three to five potato sections in the soil depending on the size of your pot.

As the potatoes start to sprout, mound up more soil around the stems. Don't cover the leaves as they need sun and air exposure. Continue this process until you reach the top of the pot. Remember to water these new soil additions.

Reaching autumn, the potato leaves (whether in the ground or in pots) will start to turn yellow/brown and die back. Once the foliage has died back and the weather is cooler, stop watering. Harvest your potatoes about two weeks after that point.

When harvesting, do not use a sharp fork or implement. Pull out all the stems and leaves wearing gloves. Dig in with your hands to find your hidden potatoes. You can also tip your container over and root around for them.



# Keystones and Caterpillars

by Linda Timmons

Strange title. But it introduces an important subject that people, and gardeners in particular, need to be aware of. For decades we've been hearing a lot about the decline of the honeybees and the monarch butterflies. However, those two species are just the tip of the iceberg. All bees and butterflies are threatened.

Now, for the rest of the story.

There has been a lot of research recently done on disappearing birds. According to a study published in 2019, during the last 50 years the bird population in North America is estimated to have dropped by 25 to 30 percent. That means we have about three billion (with a **B**) fewer birds than we had in 1970. The losses aren't the same for all bird species. Grassland and shore birds have decreased more than the average but ducks, geese and bald eagle populations have increased.

## *Insect-Eating Bird Population is Declining*

It appears that insect-eating birds are declining the fastest. In an article published in January 2021, Douglas Tallamy and an associate, W. Gregory Shriver, professors in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, asked the question, "Are declines in insects and insectivorous birds related?" Their study suggests that insect-eating bird populations are limited by the amount of insect food available.



*Gulf fritillary caterpillar on passion vine*

## *The Best Baby Bird Food*

Cardinals, chickadees, finches, and most of the songbirds that come to our bird feeders are in that "insect-eating" bird population that is declining. We think of them as seed eaters but their babies need protein to grow and caterpillars are the best baby bird food available. One pair of chickadees needs 350 to 570 caterpillars per day to feed their fledglings.

## *Keystone Native Plants are Essential*

Where can the songbirds we love find enough insects to raise their young year after year? Native plants seem to be the



*Longleaf pine at the Texas Master Gardener Wildscape Garden*

answer, in particular, plants that have been called "keystones". Keystone plants are species of plants that are considered essential to maintaining the ecosystem.

One study showed that 90 percent of all caterpillar diversity is supported by just 14 percent of plant species. The biggest contributors are keystone trees. In North America, native oaks alone host at least 557 species of moths and butterflies. Oak, willow, pine, and plum trees are four easily grown keystone trees that support caterpillars in East Texas

At the Texas Master Gardener Wildscape Garden at the Mineola Nature Preserve we planted red oak, black willow, longleaf pine, and Mexican plum trees. We've found them easy to grow. They only require additional summer water for the first four to five years after planting.

## *Our Challenge as Gardeners*

Our challenge as gardeners is not just to make a more beautiful world but to make our little piece of the world a better place for all the critters with whom we share it.

To learn more about keystone plants for our ecoregion see the National Federation of Wildlife site at <https://www.nwf.org/garden>.

# What's Going On In My Garden

by Jesse Mellon

Hallelujah, the cedar waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) finally made an appearance on February 11! A flock of about 20 perched in the hickory tree and took turns flying back and forth to the American holly (*Ilex opaca*). The following day, a flock of about 60 returned for the feast of holly berries. Berries rained down. Another food source is berry-laden Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) although the birds seem to favor the larger American holly berries. These little birds are a delight to watch and I hope they are a harbinger of spring.



Cedar waxwing in cedar tree. Photo by Kathy Goodman

Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*) has held its blooms through several cycles of frosty nights and warmer days. The red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) broke leaf buds during the warmer

weather, only to lose the buds to frosty overnight temperatures. It is a tough and determined little tree. I admire its tenacity and perseverance.

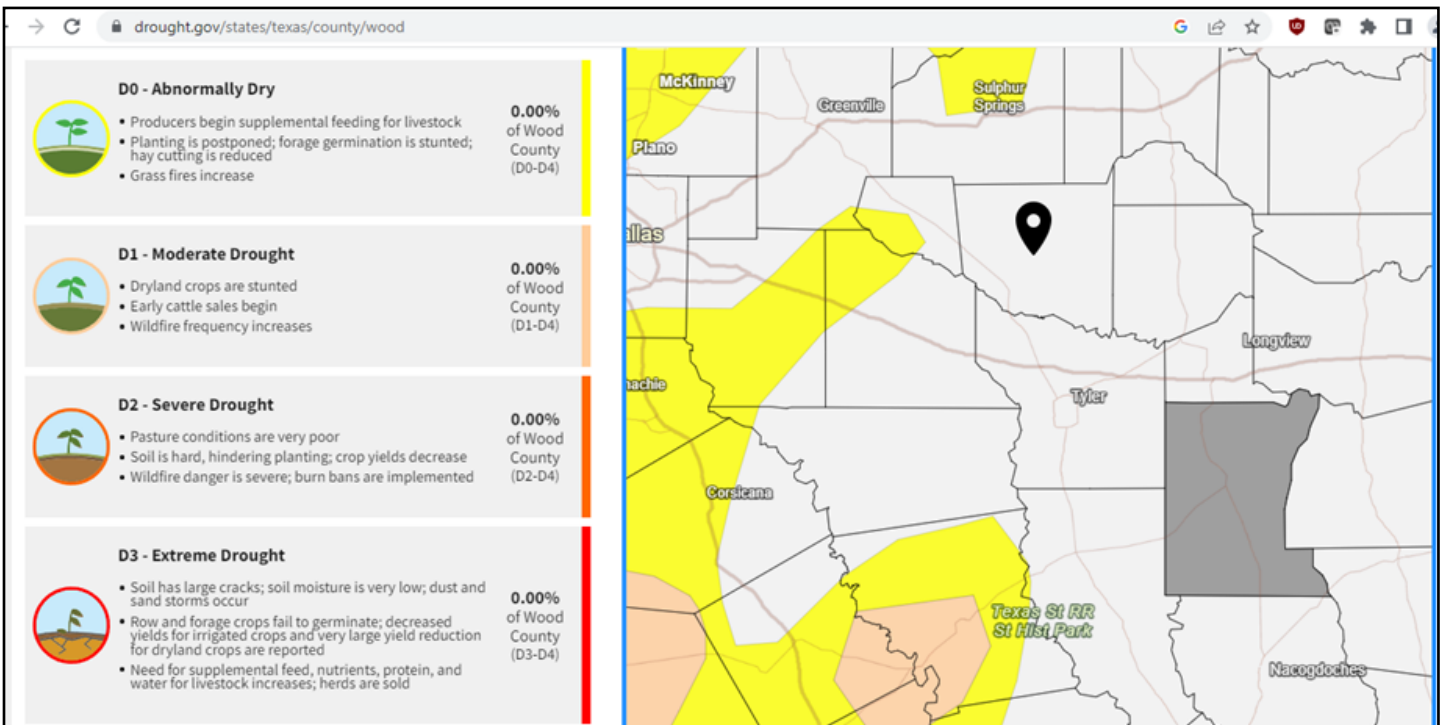
Other species that I follow are still dormant. Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), purple passion vine (*Passiflora incarnata*), and pawpaw, (*Asimina triloba*) are still dormant.

Like its larval host, purple passion vine, Gulf fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*) butterflies have yet to make an appearance. I hope to chart the phenophases of this insect-to-host relationship.

## Weather Report

Meteorologists predict that La Niña conditions will persist throughout our spring but will begin to wane as fall approaches. I am encouraged by this news and welcome our latest spring rains.

According to the USGS rain gauge at Winnsboro, Texas, we have received 4.49 inches of precipitation. This is welcome moisture. Wood County is no longer in drought conditions.



Source: <https://www.drought.gov/states/texas/county/wood>



# Straw Bale Gardening

by Barbara Williams

I first learned about gardening in a straw bale in 2017 while I was taking the Master Gardener training class. I tried it out that year for strawberries. Looking through my notes, it appears I've used this technique every year since, except last year. It's a great way to create a bed in just two weeks and I also recommend using straw bales to fill up a deep raised bed.

To start the process, you need to decide what you want to grow in the bales and choose a sunny location. Then, using the square foot gardening chart (a straw bale is roughly 1 foot by 3 feet), decide how many bales you'll need. Keep in mind if the sides are available, you can grow in that space as well.



First attempt in 2017

## Buying the Bales

I personally prefer straw bales to hay. Hay bales are alright if you have a trusted source and know for certain that a large leaf herbicide was not used on the crop. The year I used hay bales (from my husband and his hay partner), I found the bales to be looser and they disintegrated faster than the straw bales I bought at the feed store. In the past, I've purchased straw bales from Pott's, Tractor Supply, and a feed store about an hour away (because I waited until late March). This year I picked them up from Long Feed & Seed in Mineola. The owner is a nice guy and he charged \$9.95 a bale.



Second attempt in 2018

## Preparing the Bales for Planting

Once you get the bales home, make sure you place them in their spots before they get wet because, once soaked, they are incredibly heavy! If you're putting them in an existing spot, just make sure the wire/string is not on the ground and you can see holes in the side facing up. (The opposite side is more bent and you won't see any holes.)

If you're starting fresh and setting the bale on existing grass or bare soil, put some cardboard down to help prevent weeds. I put hardware cloth down first (to deter those rotten gophers) and then cardboard that sticks out about 6 inches from the sides of the bales. In 2018, for a 9' x 9' space, I put three bales



Hay bale garden in April 2018



Complete garden with hay bale garden in July 2018

together on a pallet twice – one pallet for my peppers and the other pallet for my tomatoes. I grew basil and other herbs out of the sides.

## Using Fertilizers

Next is the fun part. Soak the bales really well with water. Then, every day for seven days add a high nitrogen fertilizer on top of the bale and water it in. For the next seven days water the bale really well.

The fertilizers I've used are:

- Hi-Yield Cottonseed Meal (6-1-1)
- Hasta Gro Plant Food (about one ounce to one gallon of water 6-12-6)
- Coffee grounds
- Fresh chicken poop (best if used towards the beginning of the process)
- Nitrate of Soda (16-0-0)
- Peter's All Purpose plant food (20-20-20)
- Blood Meal (12-0-0)
- All Purpose Fertilizer (21-0-0)
- Composted chicken manure
- Pennington Citrus & Avocado (10-5-5)
- Sta-Green Plant Food (24-8-16).

As you can see, the main theme is high nitrogen and the reason is to start breaking down the straw. I pour or shake enough over the bale to lightly cover the top and then water it in really well. The next seven days, and up to when you plant, continue to water really well. You want to keep the straw wet and breaking down.

## Planting in the Bales

When you plant, use a handheld cultivator to dig out a small hole big enough for your transplant. I put a handful of potting soil in the hole, then I sprinkle a little Epsom salt (for trace minerals) and gypsum (for calcium) on top of the soil. Then I pop my transplant in (soil and all) and tamp it down. The straw you pulled out works well as mulch around your new plant. Water as you would in any other bed, just be aware that the straw drains faster than soil and

therefore will dry out faster in the heat of July and August.

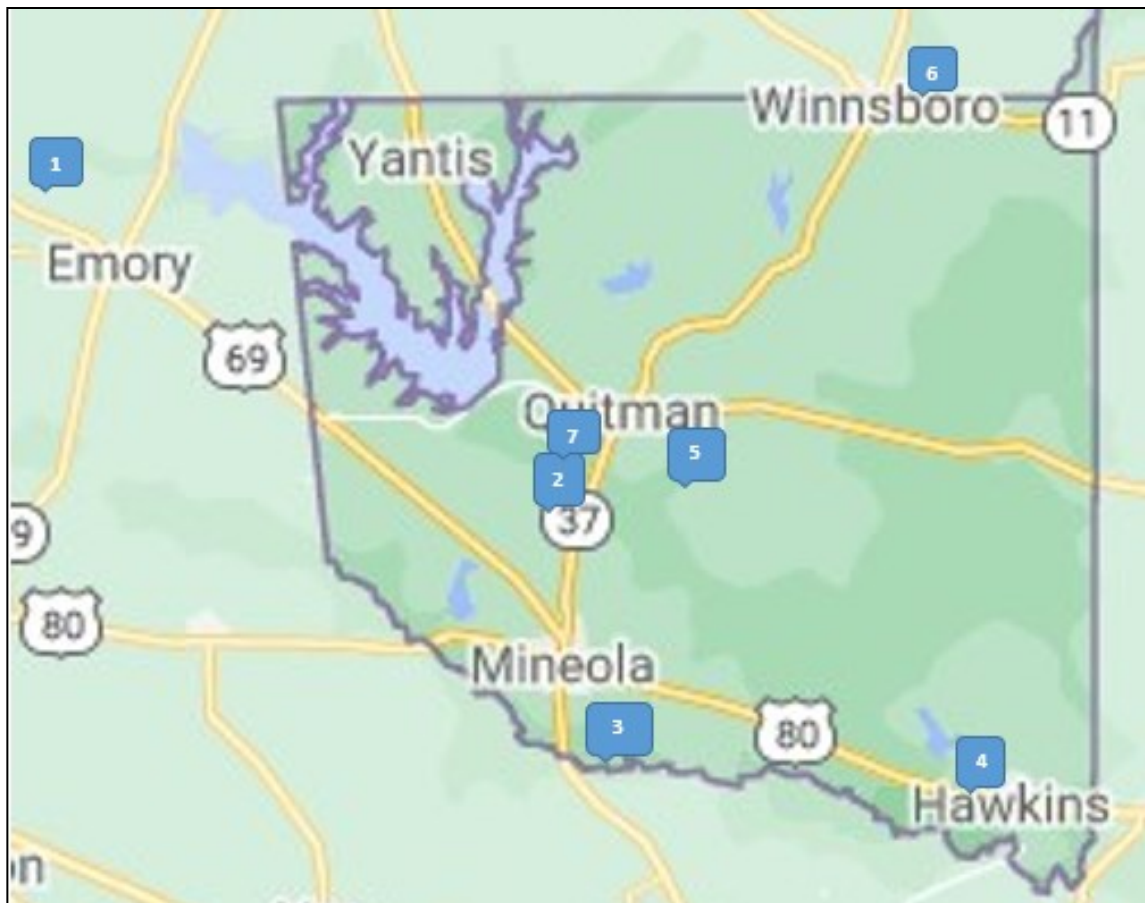
At the end of the season, you'll be rewarded with the best smelling compost in the middle of your bale and you can use the still intact straw on the top and edges as mulch for those hardier plants that overwinter in the ground.

# WCMGA Projects Map

by Barb Williams

*This map shows the location of each of the WCMGA projects.*

*See the list below for the project names, project chairs, and work days relating to the numbers on the map.*



### Current Projects

1. Emory Park (Emory)  
Project Chair: Lannette Beaver  
Workday: Varies
2. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office (EOG)  
Project Chair: Martha Maurits  
Workday: Thursday @ 9 am
3. Mineola Nature Preserve (MNP)  
Project Chair: Linda Timmons  
Workday: Tuesday @ 1 pm
4. Hawkins City Park and Library (HCP)  
Project Chair: Ann Reynolds  
Workday: Friday @ 9 am

### Soft Launch Projects (1-Year Trial)

5. Quitman Public Library (QPL)  
Project Chair: Jan Whitlock  
Workday: Monday @ 2 pm
6. Winnsboro Library (WINNS)  
Project Chair: Bob and Patt Bauerschmidt  
Workday: Monday @ 10 am

7. Wood County Arboretum & Botanical Gardens (WCABG)  
Project Chair: Lin Grado  
Workday: Wednesday @ 9 am

Please sign up on the Texas Master Gardener Volunteer Management System (VMS) for each of the projects you would like an email from so you can receive up-to-date information about a particular project.

### For Texas Master Gardeners in Wood County

To Sign Up for a Project:

1. Sign in to Texas Master Gardener VMS at [https://vms.texasmg.org/sec\\_Login/](https://vms.texasmg.org/sec_Login/)
2. Select **GENERAL INFORMATION > PROJECTS**.
3. Click an **ID** for a project. For example:



The **PROJECTS** tab opens.

4. Scroll to the bottom. Add **Notes** to indicate that you want to offer a particular skill, and then click **Volunteer for this Project**. You will receive an email verifying your sign up.



## Area Food Pantries for Vegetable Donations

Thank you for helping feed the hungry! Please track the number of pounds that you donate for the year.

All the pantries that we contacted are pleased to accept donations of fresh vegetables. There may be other programs that are not widely published. So, if you discover a program that is not on this list, please notify Kathy Goodman so she can update the list.

### Tracking Vegetable Donations

Please include the following information when you donate vegetables to a program:

Your name

Texas Master Gardener-Wood County

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension System

Also, please create a vegetable donation record by tracking how many pounds of fruits and vegetables you are producing per square foot or acre of your garden and track every time you harvest or donate. For Wood County Extension Agent Emily (Husmann) Castillo's reports for the year, she needs the total pounds of produce grown by Wood County Master Gardeners as well as the total pounds of produce donated.

So, each time you donate, please record:

- Estimated pounds harvested during that donation period
- Estimated pounds donated

Then, at the end of the season, please total each amount and give that information to Wood County Extension Agent Emily (Husmann) Castillo.

emily.husmann@ag.tamu.edu

Extension Office: 903.763.2924, FAX: 903.763.2092

### Texas AgriLife Extension Service Mission Statement

*Working hand-in-hand with its Texas A&M System partners, the state legislature, and the communities it serves, the Texas AgriLife Extension Service mission to serve Texans through community-based education has remained unchanged for almost a century. With a vast network of 250 county Extension offices, 616 Extension agents, and 343 subject-matter specialists, the expertise provided by AgriLife Extension is available to every resident in every Texas county.*

Reference: <https://txmg.org/contacts/agrilife-extension>

*To learn about how to become a Master Gardener, contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office for Wood County 903.763.2924*

### Area Food Pantries

The following food pantries accept donations of fresh vegetables.

#### Alba

##### Alba-Golden Food Pantry

245 E. Holley Street, Alba (903) 765-2471

Friday 9 AM - 11 AM

Service Area: Alba-Golden School District

##### Lake Fork Baptist Church Feed My Sheep (Pantry)

9483 W FM 515, Alba (903) 473-9523

Second Tuesday 1 PM - 3 PM

Service Area: All counties

#### Hawkins

##### Hawkins Helping Hands (Pantry)

320 W. Front St., Hawkins (903) 769-4357

Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 9 AM - 12 PM

Service Area: Hawkins ISD

#### Mineola

##### Bread of Life Ministries (Pantry)

1001 E. McDonald, Mineola (903) 405-0064

First and third Tuesday 8:30 AM - 4 PM

Service Area: Wood County

##### Kindness Kottage (Pantry)

316 E. Broad St, Mineola (903) 569-9197

Monday - Friday 9 AM - 3 PM

Service Area: Mineola ISD

##### Rose Hill Food Pantry

1420 CR 2460, Mineola (903) 312-3256

Second and fourth Wednesday 10 AM - 12 PM

Service Area: Wood County

#### Quitman

##### First United Methodist Church (Senior Box)

406 E Lane St, Quitman (903) 597-3663

Second Friday Participating Clients: 9 AM - 10 AM

Waiting Clients: 10 AM - 11 AM

Service Area: All counties

Note: Enter on N. Goldman St.

##### Mercy Mall (Pantry)

104 Bermuda, Quitman (903) 497-0684

Every Saturday 10 AM - 12 PM

Service Area: All

#### Winnsboro

##### Winnsboro CRC (Pantry)

115 W. Broadway, Winnsboro (903) 342-3287

Tuesday & Thursday 10 AM - 2 PM

Service Area: Winnsboro ISD



As you read the WCMGA newsletter, you can see information about:

- Educational seminars and classes
- Garden projects
- Educational articles written by Master Gardeners
- Community outreach events

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Please send newsletter articles, suggestions, and interesting information to newsletter editor Kathy Goodman.

**Note:** For writing articles, you can count up to 3 hours as Project: NL volunteer hours in VMS. Put the number of hours for research under Project: Research in VMS. Please understand that all articles will be edited to fit the newsletter style or for spacing needs.

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## WCMGA Information and Educational Opportunities

### MG Wood Works Newsletter Photos

Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this publication were taken by the author of the article in which they appear.

### Texas Master Gardener, Wood County Website

<http://txmg.org/woodcounty> This website contains up-to-the-minute news and scheduled events, back issues of the newsletter, and seasonal videos. Send new content for the website to Keith Zimmerman.

### WCMGA Private Facebook Group

This private Facebook group is for the Wood County Master Gardeners Association members. To join, contact Linda Timmons.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1534107646899295/>

### Wood County Master Gardeners Public Facebook Group

This public Facebook group contains information about upcoming events at the Wood County Master Gardener Association projects, Master Gardener programs, and other useful horticulture information.

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

### Volunteer Management System

VMS is most user-friendly when using a computer, iPad, or tablet. The system has some nice features, such as copying a previous entry and changing the date and hours. Please add your photo, volunteer hours, mileage, and CEUs.

**Associate Roster:** WCMGA members can find email addresses and contact information for Master Gardeners in VMS. Please update your profile and add your photo in the Roster. Check your listing to be sure your contact information is up-to-date. If you have problems entering your hours or updating your information, please contact Linda Timmons.

<https://vms.texasmg.org/>

### Advanced Training

Visit the **Texas Master Gardener Advanced Training** website for information about advanced training topics and opportunities.

<https://mastergardener.tamu.edu/master-gardener-specialist/>

### Sunshine

Know of a member who needs a get well, warm thought, or sympathy card? Contact Elaine Porter.

*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.*