



# Ellis County Master Gardener's E-Gardening Newsletter



Volume II, Issue I

Official E-letter of the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association, Waxahachie, Texas

March, 2008

Welcome to the Ellis County Master Gardener's **E-Gardening** newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give you a month by month agenda of what you should be doing to your landscape. We will be featuring horticulture articles that we hope you will find interesting, important dates where you can find the Master Gardeners speaking, demonstrating and passing out information relative to your garden. If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via your email address, log onto our website [www.ECMGA.com](http://www.ECMGA.com), click on subscribe, and it will be sent around the 1st of every month. Best of all; it's FREE!

Melinda Kocian, editor



## It's Finally Here....!

### Ellis County Master Gardener's 8th Annual Lawn and Garden Expo

Saturday, March 29 • Waxahachie Civic Center • 9 am. – 5 p.m.



## It's for Everyone!

This year's event is a multi-dimensional, educational extravaganza...In other words, it's going to be a **REALLY BIG SHOW!** There are learning opportunities for all family members.

### The Children's Gardening Workshops

Allow children to experience the joys of hands-on garden-related activities. This program was initiated last year; its success prompted doubling the workshop area this year. Activities are designed to address diverse learning styles and interests. The workshops will operate continuously from 9 a.m.—4 p.m. Each child must be accompanied by an adult.

### Keynote speakers

**Gaye Hammond**, 1 p.m., A talented Rosarian, EarthKind enthusiast and provocative speaker, will offer ideas on "Introducing Children to the Joy of Growing Roses".

**Neil Sperry**, 2 p.m., The popular horticulture author and garden-talk-show personality presents "*Growing Green – The Art of Responsible Gardening*".

**Dotty Woodson**, 3:30 p.m., Extension Horticulturalist and TV gardening pro, offers tips on "*Landscape Plants that Flower all Summer.*"

### Adult Workshops

**DeAnn Bell**, 9 a.m., Master Gardener, provides a "**Container Gardening**" demonstration plus planting tips and techniques.

**Nancy Prikryl**, 11 a.m., Master Gardener and Master Naturalist, will share her knowledge and enthusiasm for "**Butterfly Gardening**".

**Robert Shugart**, 1 p.m., Master Gardener, will be front and center to share his expertise regarding "**Vegetable Gardening and Drip Irrigation.**"

**Dan and Debbie Rayfield**, 3 p.m., from Midlothian, will discuss "**Bluebird Habitat and Houses**". Their program includes a birdhouse construction demonstration.

### Master Gardener Information Area

Head for this area if you have a troubling lawn and garden question. Master Gardeners will be available all day to discuss your lawn and garden concerns and provide free reference materials pertinent to many common questions. In addition, Master Gardener experts with knowledge in specific areas have been scheduled to appear in the area at the following times:

**Turf and Lawns**, 9-11 a.m., Jim Tachias

**Perennials/ Annuals/Companion Plants**,

11-1:00 p.m., Shirley Campbell

**Trees/Tree Diseases/Tree Health**,

1-3:00 p.m., Dexter Hollabaugh

### Vegetable Gardening, 3-5 p.m.,

Robert Shugart

Year after year, Expo attendees rave about the diversity and number of lawn and garden exhibitors available. This year, over **100 booths will display the latest products and services and an array of plant materials.** It is in the exhibit area that many attendee questions are answered – be it questions about landscaping, pest control, hardscaping, tools/equipment or plant selection. Traditionally, exhibitors have had elaborate displays in hopes of winning the Expo's coveted Outstanding Booth and Most Creative Booth Awards.

### Master Gardener Plant Sales

**9 a.m.-5 p.m.** Another very popular Expo feature; a cooperative agreement with the Waxahachie High School to use their greenhouse has permitted Master Gardeners to have more plants to sell this year than ever before. To coincide with the Adult Workshop topics, the sale will feature butterfly-attracting plants, natives, tomatoes and hard to find plants.

### **Where will you head first at the Expo?**

- Keynote speakers,
- Workshops,
- Information area,
- Plant sales or
- Exhibits?

**There is something for everyone!**



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## What's Happening in March

**Saturday, March 1, 10:30 - Petal Pusher's Garden Emporium**, Cedar Hill; "Rose Day".

**10:30 a.m.**, "Propagate Your Own Roses", presented by Glen Schroetter, Propagate Director of the Antique Rose Emporium.

**1:00 p.m.**, "Tried, True and What's New", presented by Vicki Thaxton

**Saturday, March 8, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. - The Greenery, Midlothian**, 972-723-0702, **All Day Organic Day**.

**9:00 a.m.**, "Organic products available in the Dallas Metroplex"; presented by Gary Harrell, our representative from Harvest Supply

**10:15 a.m.**, "The Organic Perennial Garden", Presented by Tropical John from Natural First

**1:00 pm.**, "Lawn and Garden Organic Procedures", presented by Andy, from Lady Bug Products

**2:15 pm.**, "Perennials and Spring Shrubs"; presented by Les Martin with Tawokoni Plant Farm

**Saturday, March 8, 9-noon**, Pettigrew Academy, Waxahachie, Dallas Zoo Nature Exchange Program at the Settle Nature Center, 806 E. Marvin Ave. For further details, please call 972-923-1633.

**Tuesday, March 11, 7:00 p.m.**, The Greenery, Vegetable Gardening, presented by Marilyn Simmons

**Saturday, March 15 and Sunday, March 16, 1:30** each day: **Weston Gardens** in Fort Worth, *St. Patrick's Day with Green Tea and Trees*, (on the historic stone ship, weather permitting). R.S.V.P., 817-572-0549. [www.westongardens.com](http://www.westongardens.com) for complete details.

**Saturday, March 29, Petal Pusher's Garden Emporium**, Cedar Hill, **All Day "Organic Day"**, 10:30 - Organic Disease & Pest Control, presented by Lucy Harrell.

### ~~~~~ Lighthouse for Learning

(with the Ellis County Master Gardeners)

For reservations, call 972-923-4631, extension 142)

**Monday, March 3, 6:00—7:30 pm** - *Rainwater Harvesting*; **Instructor:** Pam Daniel. Learn the basics of rainwater harvesting, collection systems and materials needed, landscaping and gardening with rainwater in mind. Cost: \$10.00

**Thursday, March 6, 6:00—7:30 pm** - *Native Plants*; **Instructor:** Bill Abbott. Learn what plants are native and how easy these plants adapt to your garden. Learn why and how these plants can enhance your garden. Cost: \$10.00.

**Monday, March 10, 6:00—7:30 pm** - *Heirloom Plants*; **Instructor:** DeAnn Bell. Come see what's new in "old" plants. Come see and learn about the beauty of plants from days gone by. Cost: \$10.00

**Thursday, March 13, 6:00—7:30 pm** - *Bee Keeping*; **Instructor:** Diane Hopkins. Learn all about Bee Keeping and how you can learn the skill of this hobby. Cost \$10.00.

**Ag 101 - Session B, (4 classes), Mondays April 7 through April 28, 6:00—8:00 pm.** *Designed for New or Small Acreage Landowners*; **Instructor:** Mark Arnold, Ellis County Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources. Cost: \$20.00.



## A Riddle from the Master Gardeners.....

**What perennial do you see in Ellis County yards after the daffodils bloom?**

They are native to our county, are primarily white and appear about the same time as the redbuds flower. You can expect to see many around March 14. Check your answer with that on page 8.



## Master Gardeners prepare for big Expo plant sale!

Submitted by Homer McCain  
Ellis County Master Gardener



Ellis County Master Gardeners are excited about the upcoming plant sale at the Expo on March 29<sup>th</sup>. This year, we will have some new, interesting, and hard to find plants than weren't available last year. We grew many of the plants at the Waxahachie High School greenhouse, and some actually came from seeds or cuttings taken from our own gardens. These plants are expected to adapt well in this area where gardening, due to the harsh climatic elements, can be a real challenge.

Here are just some of the many plants available:

- **Hard-to-fine perennials:** Lantana 'Silver Mound', Ruby grass, Salvia 'Indigo Spires', Monarda 'Peters Purple', and Cat Whiskers-Purple.
- **New and interesting plants:** Salvia 'Hotline Blue', Cuphea 'Miss Priss', Mexican flame vine and Turk's cap 'Big Mama'.
- **Herbs:** Burnet, Catmint 'Blue Carpet'.
- **Butterfly/Bee/Hummingbird Plants:** Butterfly weed, Hummingbird Mint (*Agastache* 'Tutti Frutti'), Fennel (Florence Sweet), and Parsley.
- **Low-water usage plants:** Guara 'Corries Gold', Yarrow, Artemisia 'Silver Mound', salvias, and lantanas.
- **Tomatoes:** Big Zac, Jelly Bean, Giant tree, Celebrity.

Also, you will find many other reliable plants, successfully grown in this area. Plants like: Butterfly bush, Salvia Greggii, Flame Acanthus, Rudbeckia 'Goldstrum,' Purple coneflower, Esperanza and more.

Early spring is a peak season for planting. So, if you are looking for the right plant for your garden; something new, something different, something your neighbors don't have -- you are likely to find it at the Expo plant sale. And remember, Master Gardeners will always be there to advise and answer your questions about any of the plants.



### Carolina Buckthorn

Scientific Name: *Rhamnus caroliniana*

This extremely versatile tree is perfect as an under-story tree, or stands on its own whether in full shade or full sun. Can be used as a small tree or a large shrub and planted in mass to form a thicket to provide food and cover for a variety of wildlife. Can tolerate most any soil, including clay, loam, sand, shallow and rocky, acidic or alkaline, but does prefer well drained soil. The bright green deciduous leaves, two to four inches in length, change to an orange or red in the fall before dropping. Sometimes retains many of its leaves year round when in full shade and a mild winter. Leaf arrangement is alternate, type is simple, margin is serrulate, shape is elliptic or oblong and venation is pinnate.

Flowers are very small greenish-white, appearing in late spring May through June, and attract butterflies. Produces small fruits about one third of an inch in diameter that start off pink, then red and then black. One nickname for this tree is Indian Cherry. The berries are thickest on trees in partial to full sun and attract wildlife, such as many birds and raccoons and are suitable for human consumption. This tree requires little maintenance and is typically not affected by pests. Propagates easily from seeds and we pick the berries and spread them through our forest area in late fall and will see seedlings in the spring.



(Photo by Pam Daniel)

**Common name:** Carolina Buckthorn  
**Family:** *Rhamnaceae*  
**USDA Hardiness Zones:** 5B through 9  
**Origin:** Native to North America and Texas

**Light Requirements:** Full sun to full shade  
**Water Demand:** Low-Medium  
**Drought Tolerance:** High  
**Height:** To 25 feet  
**Deciduous/Evergreen:** Deciduous

This plant has been grown by  
The Ellis County Master Gardeners  
And will be sold at the  
Expo on March 29th.

Submitted by Rick Daniel,  
2008 Ellis County Master Gardener Intern

## ROSES FOR WORKING PEOPLE - THE EARTH-KIND® CONCEPT

By Gaye Hammond, Houston Rose Society  
Submitted by James Kocian

**The following article by Gaye Hammond with the Houston Rose Society which gives a history of the EarthKind concept. Gaye is one of the keynote speakers at our March 29<sup>th</sup> Lawn & Garden Expo. Also at the Expo, find out about the newest EarthKind® rose. This rose is also named the EarthKind rose of the year for 2008. We will be giving away one of these roses each hour during the Expo.**

The Earth-Kind® Rose Program is probably the most significant development in rose horticulture since the creation of the modern rose!

Four years ago when Dr. Steve George told me that there were roses that would grow and thrive on absolutely no human care I said one of two things had happened to him. He had either lost his mind or he didn't know much about growing roses. I have come to regret those words.

We are all too familiar with the bad reputation that roses have been saddled with in the last century (roses are hard to grow, they have to be sprayed every few days, they are picky about their soil conditions, etc). In some respects this reputation is the by-product of man's desire to create the perfect bloom, sacrificing the plant's genetic propensity for fragrance, disease and insect resistance in favor of bigger blooms, bolder colors and long stems. Today, the home gardener must adapt their maintenance program to compensate for absence of the genetic qualities that make roses care free. This equates to implementing regular spray regimes to combat fungal problems and insect infestations and the addition of copious amounts of fertilizers and bloom enchanters to maintain high yields.

In reality the typical home gardener (non-Rosarian) waters their roses when the plant wilts, applies chemical treatments once the bush has no leaves, does little or no amending of the soil, becoming frustrated when the roses do not meet their expectations. A high-maintenance approach to rose horticulture is not only disappointing for the home gardener, it is what usually steers them to growing something other than roses. Even though it

seems that everyone "wants" to grow roses, a large population of home gardeners have such a strong perception that they are doomed to fail if they try to grow roses - they simply refuse to try. This perception is one that members of local rose societies constantly battle in our attempts to secure new members while encouraging rose horticulture within our communities.

Rose demise, however, does not rest solely at the entrance to the home garden. Many times, a gardener's failure with roses has absolutely nothing to do with the gardener's horticultural practices. A huge percentage of the 30 million rose bushes sold each year will not survive their third growing season for reasons unrelated to the gardener. There are four primary reasons for rose demise:

- (1) Adversities encountered in the planting and/or lack of vigor of the cultivar,
- (2) significant stressors to the cultivar through the harvesting, storage and shipping phases,
- (3) improper care at the retail level prior to sale, and
- (4) improper care and maintenance by the buyer.

Sometimes even the keen eye of an experienced Rosarian misses the subtle signs of rose demise and buys a rose that does not survive more than a few years.

The Earth-Kind® Rose Program is the key to overcoming the public's hesitation at growing roses. Roses which have received the coveted Earth-Kind® designation have been subjected to rigorous, scientifically sound, statistically significant research meticulously performed by Texas A&M University. Earth-Kind® Roses have been proven to give consistently high performance irrespective of diverse geographic regions and soil conditions they are grown in. For these reasons Earth-Kind® Roses are the perfect prescription for anyone wanting to grow care-free roses.

Earth-Kind® Roses have been proven to be the BEST flowering varieties requiring the LEAST amount of care and maintenance that GROW in geographically diverse regions and climate zones and REDUCE the need for pesticides and fungicides by 95%. If you can grow weeds you

can grow Earth-Kind® Roses!

### **Birth of the Earth-Kind® Concept**

Whether you grow 1 rose bush or 100, someone has surely asked you to recommend a rose that is easy to grow. Prior to our research, the answer to this question was solely based on the personal experience of the individual Rosarian. Naturally this shoot-from-the-hip approach has its pitfalls. First and foremost, it does not take into account the horticultural expertise (or lack thereof) of the grower, geographic and growing conditions and the inherent disease resistance of the cultivar recommended.

In the early 1990s, landscape professionals asked Dr. George and Texas A&M University for recommendations on roses that gave not only outstanding performance in southern gardens, but also had the characteristics of being low maintenance. Dr. George was surprised that this question had never been scientifically answered, and in 1996 started the Earth-Kind® Rose Program. When the results of the first phase of the research program were released in 2002, the Houston Rose Society recognized the significance of this research project and agreed to provide the funding to expand the Earth-Kind® Program to not only identify additional cultivars that grow well in the South, but also to identify 30 cultivars which grow equally well from Canada to the Gulf Coast and from the Atlantic to the Pacific states.

### **Scope of the Research**

The initial 5-year research study included 468 bushes (117 different cultivars) and was designed to identify the most beautiful care-free roses ever developed for Southern gardens. Of the cultivars studied, 11 showed spectacular performance despite very adverse growing conditions and an almost complete lack of maintenance throughout the study period. For example:

Rose cultivars included in the study were grown in highly alkaline clay soil with a pH rating between 8.0 and 8.4. (Ideally, roses grow best in slightly acid soils with a pH rating of 6.5); Test beds contained

*(Continued on page 5)*

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unimproved soil with no soil amendments added at any time during the study period;

- The roses were NEVER fertilized;
- The roses were NEVER sprayed with fungicides or insecticides;
- The roses received NO supplemental watering after the first year;
- The roses were NEVER pruned other than to remove dead wood.

Study criteria required that researchers subject the selected cultivars to the absolute meanest conditions possible in what can only be described as "rose abuse". The purpose of such criteria was to replicate in a uniform fashion the extremes that the home gardener levies on his roses. The only acts of kindness these bushes received were the addition of a 4-inch layer of mulch in the form of raw hardwood chips maintained on the beds throughout the research period and the addition of drip irrigation during the first year only.

In order to receive the Earth-Kind® designation, the cultivars were required to:

Exhibit outstanding disease and insect tolerance/resistance;

- Produce spectacular blooms;
- Be the best varieties for organic management methods;
- Reduce the need to applications of pesticides/fungicides by 95%;
- Reduce the need for supplemental watering by 70%.

The heat and drought tolerance of the cultivars which received the initial Earth-Kind® designation is so strong that all 11 varieties continued to flourish in their second growing season without supplemental watering through a 67-day drought with daily temperatures at or exceeding 100 degrees. The only noticeable effect of heat extremes was a reduction in bloom size.

All roses receiving the Earth-Kind® designation are grown on their own roots and are either highly tolerant or tolerant to blackspot. Research showed that affected bushes dropped 25% or less of their leaves once a year. None of the cultivars exhibited significant insect problems at any time during the study period.

### The First Earth-Kind® Roses

In January 2002, at the conclusion of the first 5-year research study, Texas A&M had identified 11 cultivars which not only survived but also produced outstanding results in southern gardens. Those 11 cultivars are:

- Sea Foam
- Marie Daly
- The Fairy
- Caldwell Pink
- Knock Out®
- Perle d'Or
- Belinda's Dream
- Else Poulson
- Carefree Beauty (Katy Road Pink)
- Mutabilis
- Climbing Pinkie

### Recommendations for the Home Gardener

All roses need to be planted in a location that has good air circulation and receives a minimum of 6 hours of direct sunlight. Even though roses in the study were planted in unimproved soil, we recommend that the home gardener plant their roses in raised beds containing a planting mix of 3" aged compost and 3" of expanded shale if you have heavy clay soil. A soil test of your planting medium is a good way to start any new garden as it ensures that the home gardener incorporates only the materials and product that is needed for roses to flourish. Soil tests are very inexpensive and the agricultural extension agent in your area will be able to direct you to organizations within your community that perform this service.

Beds should be topped with 2 to 4 inches of hardwood mulch to insulate the root zone and retard moisture loss. Supplemental watering via drip irrigation throughout the first year is recommended. NEVER water roses at night as this establishes the perfect host environment for blackspot to develop.

Roses which have received the Earth-Kind® designation do not require regular pruning. If the bushes grow outside their bounds, a light shaping is all that is necessary. We do recommend that you remove any dead wood as it develops. Research

identified all of these Earth-Kind® Roses as self-deadheading (meaning they drop spent blooms on their own), however like all repeat-blooming roses, the bushes will set new buds faster if the spent blooms are removed. Depending on the cultivar, allowing the bushes to self-deadhead adds an additional 1 to 2 weeks to the bloom cycle.

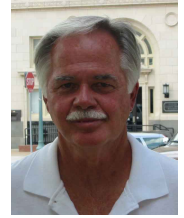
Maintaining a 3 to 4 inch layer of hardwood mulch on your Earth-Kind® Roses will eliminate the need to fertilize the bushes with commercial or organic fertilizers. Even though roses are known as heavy feeders, we have found that maintaining a 3 to 4 inch layer of hardwood mulch (preferably containing shredded hardwood, outer bark and leaf tissue) replicates forest floor conditions. Gardeners will find during the first year the bottom inch of mulch will decompose. If, at the end of the first year, the gardener adds another inch of mulch on top of the existing layers it should take only 6 months for the next bottom inch of mulch to decompose. After the first year, gardeners who have created this "living mulch" cycle will only need to add 1 inch of hardwood mulch 2 times each year.

For those of you doubting the effectiveness of this approach, I suggest that you look at Mike Shoup's books, *Hardy Roses* and *Roses in the Southern Garden*. Both of these books contain wonderful photographs of roses that are grown in landscape settings at the Antique Rose Emporium sites in Texas.

"At the Antique Rose Emporium, we have not applied any commercial or organic fertilizers to our landscape roses in the last 10 years," says owner, Mike Shoup "Our approach to fertilization by sustaining a cycle of living mulch provides all of the fertilize that is necessary for the realization of outstanding bloom production on our roses. Think about it, no one is out there fertilizing those 100 year old roses we find in abandoned cemeteries. My philosophy is that if dead people can grow roses this way, anyone will be successful," explains Mike.



## *Madame Antoine Mari* **EarthKind™ Rose of the year for 2008**



**This 100 year old rose is so outstanding that it is not only new to EarthKind™ but also named EarthKind™ Rose of the year for 2008**

**These must have rose plants will be given away Free as a door prize at the March 29<sup>th</sup> Lawn & Garden Expo.**

Camellia-like blooms are rosy flesh shaded lilac on a tidy bush suitable for containers. Quelled petals create shapely, fragrant blooms that are double, full and large. The buds are particularly beautiful. The plant has plum colored canes with light green leaves and thorns. It has a nice tea aroma in the hot weather.

Like so many of the old roses, Madame Antoine Mari works well as a stand alone specimen, providing a useful accent in a perennial border. Plant Madame Antoine Mari in full sun and well drained soil. Keep the soil moist during the growing season for the first year for good root development and establishment. Keep a 3" to 4" inch layer of organic mulch around plants during the establishment and thereafter. The plant has good disease resistance.

Cultivar Name:	<b>Madame Antoine Mari</b>	Mature Width:	3 - 5 feet
Blossom Color:	Pink and Cream	Rose Category:	Tea, Growth Habit Shrub
Blossom/Fragrance:	Double – Fragrant	Hardiness Zones:	6-9
Blooming Period:	repeat blooming	Number of petals:	25+
Mature Height:	3 - 5 feet		

### **What does being named an EarthKind rose mean?**

Dr. Steven W. George, Professor and Extension Landscape Specialist with Texas A&M University explains:

"After years of extensive field research, during which no pesticides of any kind were applied, only a few very special roses have received the prestigious EarthKind™ designation from horticultural experts at Texas A&M University. These beautiful roses are proven to deliver outstanding landscape performance under widely varying soil conditions, with minimal care, and provide maximum protection for the environment. While certainly not immune to pest problems, their tolerance to pests is so great that, as long as you do not mind a few leaflets dropping occasionally, almost never will you need to apply any harsh pesticides to these roses! I think that you will be very impressed with the tremendous performance of these easy-care roses - we certainly are."



## **Rose Gardening in Containers**

*By Melinda Kocian, Ellis County Master Gardener*



Growing roses in tubs, barrels, planters or other containers is a reflection of how today's society wants both versatility and mobility in their home and garden designs. Portable rose plantings are not only a decorative addition to any part of the outdoor living area. They are also a perfect way to change the look of the landscape from month to month or year to year.

Roses in pots extend the scope and possibilities of gardening. Wide walkways can be highlighted with tubs of roses spotted here and there. Steps to the front or back door can be graced with the beauty and fragrance of roses. Miniature roses can dress up window boxes in the summer, and then be brought indoors in winter to perk up the house.

Patios, decks and terraces have become favorite spots for entertaining and relaxing on warm summer days and evenings. Planters teeming with the color and fragrance of the world's favorite flower add to the pleasure of these moments. At night, a white or pastel rose, such as Cherish, French Lace, or Rose Parade illuminates a dark setting. Bring color right down to the swimming pool with pots of roses set around the perimeter.

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If you have a spot for a hanging basket, fill it with miniature roses for a continuous display of summer color, then move the basket indoors for the winter. Select a trailing variety and let the flowers cascade from tree limbs, overhangs, and brackets.

For gardeners "without a garden", containers make it possible to grow roses on balconies, terraces, and rooftops that are high above city streets. The limited gardening space that comes with condos, town houses and brownstones can be multiplied with portable planters.

Movable roses should be the shorter-growing varieties of the modern-day hybrid roses because they are more compact and have great flourishes of flowers throughout the summer. Good selections are New Year, Showbiz, Impatient, Intrigue, Sun Flare, Mon Cheri, Marina, Charisma, First Edition, Cathedral, Bahia, Electron, Redgold, Gene Boerner, Angel Face, Europeana, Garden Party, Sarabande, or Ivory Fashion.

Tree roses of all sizes are perfect for containers and should be placed wherever an accent is needed. Plant colorful geraniums, sweet alyssum, or other annuals at the base to fill in the void, soften the lines, and create two levels of interest.

Containers can be any shape—round or hexagonal—as long as they are 18 inches across and 14 inches deep for proper root development (except for minis, which can grow in smaller containers). Use pots made of plastic, clay, terra cotta, ceramic, metal or wood. All they need to be effective is drainage at the bottom. If you're working with a planter that does not have drainage holes, add a thick layer of gravel at the bottom of the container so the roots do not become waterlogged. Pots can be heavy and difficult to move about, so casters are an excellent addition.

All roses need at least six hours of sun each day. Ideally, place movable roses where they receive morning sun and some protection from the midday heat. Also, try to keep them out of drying winds. If the plants receive uneven sun and start growing in one direction to reach the light, rotate them often to keep their growth straight.

Roses in containers will need more water than the same roses in the ground. Not only are all sides of the container subject to drying sun and winds, there is also no ground water to fall back on. Watch planters carefully and water whenever the growing medium starts to dry out. Water until moisture runs from the bottom of the container. A layer of mulch on top of the planter will help keep the roots of the roses moist and cool.

Planting medium for containers should be rich and well drained. A packaged or homemade mix of half organic matter, such as peat moss or compost, and half perlite or vermiculite is ideal. Just as roses in pots must be watered often, they must also be fertilized frequently. Feed each week with a soluble fertilizer at 1/4 strength for even growth and flowering.

When winter comes, move the pots into an unheated but frost-free area, keep the soil slightly moist, cover with plastic and return them to the outdoors in spring.

## Is it Spring Yet?

by Nancy Fenton, Ellis County Master Gardener

Our warm, but very dry winter has certainly taken its toll on our landscaping around here. Everywhere there are shrubs and bushes struggling or already needing to be replaced. As we all tackle the job of getting yards back into shape, lets reflect on some of the things that didn't go so well last time we did this.

Over the years we've all had to learn by errors in judgment and deed and I share some of my hard won lessons with you now.

1. **Plant things that will grow to the right size to start with.** A tree that grows to 45 feet has no place under an eave of the house even if it looked great there when it was only 7 feet tall.
2. **Give established trees room by avoiding blooming flowers under them.** Plant ground covers instead. They'll do better in the shade anyway.
3. **Prune and trim large trees carefully** taking only dead limbs and those that cross rather than cleaning out all through. Never top a mature tree. Do cut any branches that slap you in the face when you mow, but do it back at the intersection of the next larger limb!
4. **Buy rain gauges and use them!** If you have watered enough to get the moisture down several inches after our dry winter, cut back to one inch a week. The beds will do well with drip systems and we all may need them if this dry weather keeps up.
5. **Walk out and check those plants regularly.** If you have just planted new shrubs or flowers they will need attention daily for a week or so and then every week the rest of the season if you want them to take hold and flourish.

Hope you didn't lose too many of your favorite things! If you did, take this chance to make a few changes. Check out the plants available at the Master Gardener's Spring Lawn and Garden Expo at the Waxahachie Civic Center on Saturday, March 29th. They not only will have plants, but also people to tell you how to plant them, what size they will get to be and which ones do well where you live. Neal Sperry will be heading up the speaker list and talks will be going on all day.





## What is a Texas Superstar?

by Kim Ellis, Ellis County Master Gardener

With the cold days of winter winding down and the spring lilies popping up, many gardeners, are scouring the aisles of the local nursery's and home and garden centers for something new to plant this year. Some of us are looking for just the right flower to attract butterflies while others want to plant something new for the beautiful hummingbirds. You may be seeing "Texas Superstar" written on many tags and wonder just exactly what makes a flower a Texas Superstar?

Like many others, you may have been told a particular flower is a must have because it is a Texas Superstar. [www.texassuperstar.com](http://www.texassuperstar.com) sheds a little light on it for us with this statement. "It isn't easy to become a Superstar. Only the toughest, most reliable and best-looking plants make the cut. Every plant earning the Texas Superstar designation undergoes several years of extensive field trials by Texas A&M University's Agriculture Program. They must be proven to be super performing plants under Texas growing conditions. During the field trials, plants receive minimal soil preparation, minimal water and no pesticides. What does that mean for the average homeowner? It means landscape success with beautiful, proven, Texas-tough plants."



I know what some of you may be thinking: "minimal soil prep, minimal water and NO pesticides? In our rock filled clay soil? Can't be done." Believe it or not it really can! The folks at A&M really do spend years in research putting these plants to the test.

In true Texas form, the very first plant on the list when you click on "Texas Superstar Plants" is none other than our own Bluebonnet. What information does the website give? Tons!

I like pictures. I love to see what the plant I am interested in is going to look like in mature or in bloom, so visiting the Superstar page is great fun for me! There is a picture of the plant along with other very useful information.

It gives the **scientific name** of the plant, *Lupinus texensis*, a **brief description**, "The state flower of Texas! This popular, low-maintenance winter annual is now available in white and pink in addition to the classic blue."



**Hardiness:** Zone 7,

**Exposure:** Full sun,

**Size:** Height 1 foot tall, 1 foot wide,

**Bloom Time:** March to May,

**Care:** For maximum spring show, plant scarified seed and/or transplants in fall. Be careful not to water too often.

One of the Superstars I look forward to seeing this year is the Larkspur. This flower is easy to grow from seed and needs full sun. When it blooms in the spring it can get up to three feet tall and one foot wide! It comes in a variety of colors such as pinks, blues, and whites.

So if you haven't decided what you want to see in your yard this year visit [www.texassuperstar.com](http://www.texassuperstar.com) and take a look at some easy to grow plants that will bring life and color to your yard. Don't forget to stop by the Master Gardener table at the Lawn and Garden Expo March 29<sup>th</sup> at the Civic Center to pick up your free information sheets on other plants to grow in your area.

## Expo Yard Signs to Pop Up in Mid-March



It's time for the Master Gardeners to change dates on their Lawn & Garden Expo signs to **March 29** and get them ready for display. Gay Doyle (Waxahachie), Brooks Humphreys (Midlothian), Susan Norvell (Red Oak), Cheryl Zink (Palmer) and Edena Hintze

(Midlothian) are among the Expo Steering Committee members helping with the project.







## Rainwater Harvesting

Pam Daniel, Ellis County Master Gardener

Rainwater harvesting (RWH) is the practice of collecting rainfall for a beneficial purpose. Rainwater harvesting usually refers to the collection of rainfall from roof surfaces and is stored in cisterns for

later use. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, RWH was practiced in Texas, but with the development of municipal water systems, the practice became obsolete. With the population projection estimated to increase from 21 million to 46 million in Texas by the year 2050, there is a renewed interest in RWH in Texas. With limited water resources and increasing demand for water, there is a growing awareness to conserve water, collect rainfall and use our most valuable resource efficiently.

Rainfall is collected from the roof through gutters and downspouts, and then directed to storage tanks or cisterns. The stored rainwater can either be pumped back into the home for potable use or used for landscape irrigation. Either way, RWH provides conservation of our water supplies.

Rainwater is free of any chemicals and/or dissolved salts. Unlike well water, rainwater is naturally soft and can be used for household purposes without the need for a water softener. Rainwater is also ideal for those on a low-sodium diet since it contains no salt. And of course plants respond much better to rainwater than they do municipal water.

A typical home with 2000 sq.ft. of roof can collect about 1,200 gallons of rainwater with every inch of rain. With the average rainfall in North Texas, a home owner can collect up to 42,000 gallons in a year! This water would otherwise run off and contribute to erosion, pollution and storm water. RWH systems are exempt from property tax and there is no sales tax for rain harvesting equipment and supplies.

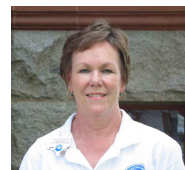
There is a growing trend for RWH in Texas as well as many other parts of the U.S. and overseas. Germany is a leading example of RWH in Europe. Australia and the Caribbean have been using RWH for many years.

There are many resources available to learn more about RWH. The following web sites are an excellent resource. Please contact the Ellis County Master Gardeners with any questions about RWH at 972-825-5175, or visit our web page at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com).

- <http://rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu>
- [www.twdb.state.tx.us](http://www.twdb.state.tx.us)
- [www.arcsoa.org](http://www.arcsoa.org)
- [www.texaswatermatters.org](http://www.texaswatermatters.org)
- [www.waterwisetexas.org](http://www.waterwisetexas.org)

## Featured Flowers of the Month

Submitted by Melinda Kocian  
Ellis County Master Gardener



### Hosta 'Frances Williams' *Hosta*

Hostas have enjoyed a long run of popularity among shade-loving plants, and rightly so. With over 4,000 varieties, there's a hosta for practically every garden and every gardener.

Like most first loves, 'Frances Williams' is not necessarily the best choice for a lasting relationship, but she holds a special place in the hearts of many hosta lovers because she was among the first variegated forms introduced.

Named for the breeder (who has 17 named hostas to her credit), this variety was registered in 1986. Ten years later, 'Frances Williams' was the fifth most popular hosta cultivar as rated by members of

the American Hosta Society.

This large-leafed hosta can reach an ultimate height of 18 inches tall and twice as wide. The quilted leaves are heart-shaped and can reach dinner-plate size. With yellow margined leaves, it's a good thing 'Frances Williams' looks great in the darker corners of the garden, because it's her intolerance to sun and heat make her a poor choice for hot, sunny spots, especially in heat-prone areas.

Sun requirements: Sun to Partial Shade, Light Shade  
Cold hardiness: Zone 3a to Zone 8b  
Spacing: 4-6 ft.



### Angel's Fishing Rod *Dierama pulcherrimum*

*Dierama pulcherrimum* lives up to its enchanting name. In midsummer, the graceful pink, magenta, or white bell-shaped flowers are strung along the delicate fishing-rod stem and sway in the breeze.

A member of the Iris family, *Dierama pulcherrimum* is native to South Africa. The species was originally collected by Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, the 19th century botanist and plant collector. Hooker traveled extensively throughout the southern hemisphere as an explorer for the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Hooker initially named this plant as *Sparaxis pulcherrima* with a number of other South African bulbs. It was later reclassified as *Dierama pulcherrimum* by John Gilbert Baker, the keeper of the Herbarium at Kew.

This perennial plant keeps its foliage in the winter, making it more temperamental than other related plants, such as gladiolus. It also requires consistent moisture during the growing season. With care, *Dierama* can be grown in protected, mild zone 7 gardens and deserves to be more widely grown in the U.S.

Type of plant:	Bulbs, Perennials
Bloom color:	Pink, Rose/Mauve, Magenta (Pink-Purple), Blue-Violet, Violet/Lavender
Bloom time of year:	Late Summer/Early Fall
Sun requirements:	Full Sun
Cold hardiness:	Zone 8a to Zone 10b
Height:	36-48 in. x 4-6 ft.
Spacing:	18-24 in.

### Jewels of Opar 'Kingswood Gold' *Talinum paniculatum*

Looking at this plant, you'd never guess it's related to Moss Rose or Portulaca. Nevertheless, it is indeed in the same family.

Even though Edgar Rice Burroughs penned *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar* in 1911, this easy to grow annual or tender perennial plant has never caught on in the gardening world, and remains relatively obscure. But it should be grown by more gardeners. *Talinum paniculatum* has incredibly lovely pink flowers followed by impossibly delicate, jewel-like seed pods that sway above fleshy stems and leaves. The seed pods tend to disburse, making sure each year will see new volunteers sprouting up in the vicinity.



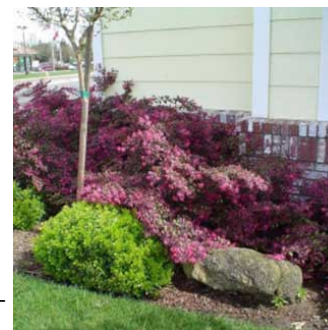
'Kingswood Gold' pairs chartreuse leaves with intense pink flowers for an interesting combination.

Type of plant:	Annuals, Tropicals and Tender Perennials
Bloom color:	Rose/Mauve, Red
Bloom time of year:	Late Spring/Early Summer, Mid Summer, Late Summer/Early Fall
Sun requirements:	Full Sun
Cold hardiness:	Zone 9a to Zone 11
Height:	6-12 in.

**Chinese Witch Hazel**  
*Loropetalum chinense var. rubrum*

As its botanical name suggests, Loropetalum is native to southeastern Asia, including both China and Japan. Its common name hints at its close relationship to Hamamelis virginiana, the common witchhazel.

A somewhat tender plant, Loropetalum is a finely-textured shrub and provides fragrant blooms in spring. Colors range from pure white to intense magenta, over foliage that is equally variable, from chartreuse green to burgundy. In a protected spot with protection from direct sun, Loropetalum can be massed or used as ornamental specimen, where its graceful shape lends itself to foundation plantings or shrub borders. Occasional pruning will keep it in check, although some newer varieties are more dwarf.



Type of plant:	Perennials	Cold hardiness:	Zone 7a to Zone 10a
Bloom color:	Pink	Height:	6-8 ft., 8-10 ft., 10-12 ft.
Bloom time of year:	Blooms repeatedly	Spacing:	4-6 ft., 6-8 ft.
Sun requirements:	Sun to Partial Shade		



**Dallas Arboretum Trial Program Plant of the Month**

by Jimmy Turner-Director of Horticulture Research

*Salvia transylvanica* 'Blue Cloud'

Here is one salvia I guarantee that you'll remember the Latin name for! *Salvia transylvanica* 'Blue Cloud' or Transylvanian sage. No, I'm not joking! This salvia is actually native to Romania. I've grown it for over 10 years, and I find it indispensable for perennial borders.

Why haven't you heard of it? I'm not really sure, but I have a theory. There are many blue salvias to choose from, and you may be familiar with some like *Salvia x superba* 'Blue Queen' or 'May Night.' They were bred to be compact and look incredible in a one-gallon pot. 'Blue Cloud' salvia, on the other hand, gets a little bigger and just doesn't look as good in a pot that small. But it looks awesome in the landscape! I like it combined with *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle' or other silver-foliaged plants, and mixed with the orange and yellow flowers of daylilies.

This hardy perennial forms tight rosettes of flat foliage though the winter. In early summer it produces numerous spikes of deep-blue lobster-claw-like flowers that get to three feet tall. If you cut back the old stems, it will re-flower. I recommend placing it in the front of the border so the foliage will not get lost among taller plants.

*Salvia transylvanica* grows best in full sun in well-drained soil. It is not choosy about soil pH, and it is very drought tolerant. After the first killing frost, cut plants back to the ground and new foliage will quickly appear and stay evergreen throughout winter.

I recommend looking for this plant in your garden center this spring. If they don't carry it, ask them to order it for you, or do a Google search and purchase it from an online company. You can purchase it as potted plants or as seed.

**About the author:** Jimmy Turner is the director of horticulture research at the Dallas Arboretum. Visit [www.dallasplanttrials.org](http://www.dallasplanttrials.org) for information on his trials.

Cold Hardiness:	5a - 8b	Spacing:	24-32"
Temperature:	-20 F	Height:	30-36"
Blooming season:	late spring, summer, late summer	Width:	24-30"
Plant habit:	upright	Exposure:	sun
Characteristics:	attracts bees, butterflies, humming birds, drought-tolerant, heat-tolerant, low-maintenance	Uses:	background, garden bed, landscape, perennial garden

**Dallas Arboretum, "We need your help!"**

We have over 3,000 varieties of fun plants for trial this summer, and we need help sticking cuttings and potting plants! If you'd be interested in helping then let us know!

We will need 5 people per shift each day. Each shift will be 4 hours long and go from 8:00 a.m.– 12 noon, and then 1-5:00 pm. If you would be interested, please email Denise Robb at [drobb@dallasarboretum.org](mailto:drobb@dallasarboretum.org) and she will put you on the schedule.

Thank you for any help you can give us!!! Jimmy Turner, Dallas Arboretum Plant Trials

## It's March - What Else Needs to be Done?

By Gay Doyle, Ellis County Master Gardener



The ideal vegetable garden soil is deep, friable, well-drained and rich in organic matter. Proper soil preparation provides the basis for good seed germination and growth of garden crops.

- Plow, spade or till the soil. Work only when the soil moisture conditions are right.
- To test moisture, pick up a handful of soil and squeeze; if it stays in a mud ball it is too wet. If it crumbles freely, it is about right. Excessively dry soil is powdery and clumpy and may be difficult to work. Add plenty of compost to the soil.
- Remember soil is alive and constantly changing. By keeping it rich and fertile, many gardening problems may be lessened.

### **Planting Seeds**

The last average freeze date in our area is March 15<sup>th</sup>. It is time to plant your garden if you have not already done so. Many seeds can be sown directly into the garden. There are charts available at the Extension office with planting times and seeds best planted this way.

If garden soil is heavy with high clay content, the seeds should be covered only 2 to 3 times their diameter. Apply a band of fine compost above the row after the seeds are planted. This helps retain soil moisture and reduces crusting, making it easier for seedlings to push through the soil surface.

### **Planting Transplants**

When using transplants, transplant on a shady day in late afternoon or early evening to prevent wilting. It helps to water the plants several hours before transplanting.

For a few days after transplanting, protect new plants from wind and sun by placing newspaper or cardboard on their south sides or by covering them with jugs, baskets, or flower pots. Water the plants once or twice during the next week, depending on the rainfall. Extra care at the beginning of growth will result in productive, healthy plants.

During growth, vegetable crops need about an inch of water per week from rain, irrigation or both. Keep a rain gauge near the garden for rainfall amounts. Supplement rainfall with irrigation water as needed.

One of the best ways to water a garden is with a drip irrigation system. When the rate is adjusted correctly, there are no puddles of water and no runoff.

### **Mulching**

Mulch is any material spread on the garden to protect root plants from heat, cold or drought; to reduce problems with weeds, and to keep fruit clean. Organic mulches are the most common. After the soil warms, apply organic mulches to a depth of 1 to 2 inches around growing plants..

Thick layers of organic mulch will prevent most annual weeds from appearing and any that do are easy to pull.

Organic mulch can also reduce water needs by as much as 50 percent by smothering weeds and by reducing evaporation of moisture from the soil. These mulches hold water themselves and increase the humidity around a plant.

At the end of the season, turn organic mulches under to improve the soil's condition.

**Plan to attend the 2008 Ellis County Master Gardener Expo on Saturday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.**

**Visit our website at [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com) or call the Extension office at 972-825-5175**