

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Our Disappearing Wildflowers

Nina Ellis

In the not so distant past, 20 years or so ago, the county right of way on the road where I live had a seasonal palette of wildflowers. As I drove down the road I marveled at the diversity of the vegetation. Today the flowers are few to missing entirely. In my opinion, the principal cause is the untimely mowing by the county. I was told they mow when they can work the time into their schedule. No thought is given to the needs of the annual flowers to make mature seeds to assure their continuing presence in the landscape. The perennial types need to make seeds occasionally, as their life span is usually only a few years. With the ever-increasing development in our rural area the wildflowers have been forced to claim the small area available to them, i. e., the fencerows.



What can we do to help insure their survival? Make your voice heard by writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper to make others aware of the visual poverty of our county roads. Take inventory of the flowers along your road and watch for the formation of seed heads, then flag the area and make a “NO MOW” sign to give the seeds the opportunity to ripen. Talk to your county commissioner and ask him to really look at the roadsides and see for himself what havoc indiscriminate mowing has created. Volunteer to keep the mowing crews informed of the status of the ripening seeds. Ask that mowing be confined to three feet on either side of the black top not all the way to the fence line.

We live in one of the most beautiful areas of Texas and are blessed with more species of wildflowers than any other part of our state. Many of our natives are classified as “threatened” at this time and should be cherished and guarded from extinction. What an asset we have in our roadsides! Personally, I gather a few selected seeds and

propagate them when I can. I hope to perpetuate their existence for a while along my county road.

Editor’s Note: The picture added to this article is of standing cypress taken at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. It was once a common wildflower in East Texas but habitat destruction and over collection have eliminated many stands.

Bring Some Of The “Old World” Into Your Texas Backyard

Judy Clamon

English cottage gardens date back to medieval Europe. These gardens employ hardy plants that can be passed down from generation to generation and enjoyed by all. European settlers brought cottage-style gardening to Texas as they began settling across the state. By employing native plants that were plentiful, beautiful, and could be used for food or medicine enabled the settlers to enjoy the fruits of their labors as well as its beauty.

Cottage gardening is becoming extremely popular today as we return to using plants that grow naturally in Texas. The basic rule for an English cottage garden is to plant a garden in which something is always happening. Even in winter the cottage garden should be decorated with colorful berries, barks, and stems of grasses and foliage. In order to create this type of garden, there are several general rules that apply.

1. Study your site to determine where sunlight and shade fall.
2. A sense of enclosure is necessary. A room-like setting is both appealing and very English. This can be accomplished with fences, shrubbery, walls, vine-covered fences or some sort of structure. Evergreens such as juniper, eastern red cedar, eldarica pine, arborvitae, Chinese photinia or Nellie R. Stevens holly might be used. Crossvine, coral honeysuckle and climbing roses can disguise the ugliest of fences.
3. Ornamental trees will provide vertical interest within the room- like space. Plants that might be used are

crape myrtles, Mexican plum, possumhaw holly, rusty blackhaw viburnum, smoke tree, and Texas kidneywood.

4. Shrubs provide contrast with the flowers that will be planted in beds. Oakleaf hydrangeas, Nandina domestica, quince, forsythia and bridal wreath work nicely in Texas weather.

5. Flowers and ground covers are the largest attraction for English cottage gardens. Use annuals for splashes of color for each season and perennials for the basic portion of the garden. Perennials such as purple coneflower, winecup, purple loosestrife, oxeye daisy, ferns (wood, holly and Japanese painted), yarrow, iris, Gregg salvis, Russian sage, yellow or red columbine, Texas lantana, Turk's cap, and Moonbeam coreopsis work quite well. Ground covers include lirioppe, mondo grass, creeping thymes,

6. Last, but certainly not least, seating, statues, walkways and containers are important in making the garden a relaxing, tranquil, and traditionally English setting. Man-made aspects that help create the ambience of a cottage garden include gravel or cobblestone walkways, and ponds fed by a waterfall or still pools. The English style is informal and natural.

The English cottage garden will thrive in Texas if the gardener will use plants that thrive here. Traditional cottage garden plants are ones that are easy to grow and perform well without a great deal of prodding.

In Memoriam

Cecelia Bowles

Blueberry lovers lost a dear friend in Dr. Madison Pace, D.D.S., who died March 1 of this year. Our family first met Dr. Pace 17 years ago when my middle daughter, Madeline, had her fifth birthday party at Dr. Pace's blueberry farm outside Athens. He was so thrilled to see the youngsters learn the joys of easy pickins from his carefully tended blueberry bushes. To this day, Madeline can be enticed out of bed with the aroma of fresh blueberry muffins wafting upstairs. Although we've continued to pick blueberries every year since, and made lots of recipes using blueberries - from blueberry wine and cordial to blueberry vinegar and coffeeecake, our family favorite, hands down, is blueberry muffins. I've made thousands of them, I'm sure! Thank you Dr. Pace, for introducing us to the thrill of Blueberry Hill!

Best Blueberry Muffins Ever:

1 egg
½ cup milk
¼ cup vegetable oil
¼ cup sugar
1 ½ cup flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt (optional)
¼ cup brown sugar
1 cup blueberries, washed (may use frozen)

Blend egg, milk and oil. Combine dry ingredients by sifting together in a large bowl. Make a well and add liquid ingredients. Stir just until blended, about ten strokes. Fold in blueberries. Fill greased or lined muffin cups 2/3 full. Bake at 375 degrees for 15 minutes or until golden. Let cool five minutes before removing.

Another great recipe which is a lot more trouble, but well worth it, and has made it into the Bowles' family cookbook, is this blueberry pie recipe:

Blueberry Pie:

1 cup sugar
4 tablespoons flour
1 cup sour cream
1 teaspoon vanilla
½ teaspoon salt
1 egg
Beat these six ingredients until smooth.

Add 5 cups fresh, washed and dried blueberries and pour into unbaked piecrust.

Topping:

½ cup flour
¼ cup butter
¼ cup brown sugar
½ cup pecan pieces
Crumble together and spread over the top of the pie.

Bake in a 400-degree oven for 45 mm. Enjoy!!

Editor's Note: I used some of my hand picked blueberries to make this pie. It was an overwhelming success. Definitely worthy of being repeated. It smelled wonderful, looked beautiful, and tasted delicious.

A Word From the President

Michael Sambogna

Baby, it's hot outside! Half a year of gardening ahead!
Dog days, summer haze, what's eating my tomatoes?
Pocket prairie, persistent bermuda, bluebirds and
dragonflies. Homegrown plums, thank you 'Gold Star'
Esperanza!

Heady scent of forbidden Mimosa, new potatoes,
crabgrass million marches, a promptly applied pasty
poultice made with alcohol, vinegar and baking soda takes
the poison out of a red wasp sting.

Summer rain! lemony daylilies, bountiful basil.
Ask me about Elmer's sure-fire-ant control!
Butternut squash, blueberry bliss, it's cooler in the woods.
Kaffir lime has freaky fruit and the leaves are good for
soup.

Thanks to Dave Altom (HC Master Gardener of the year)
for bringing us a primer on Rainwater Harvesting at the
June meeting. The program was informative and started
many wheels turning. Water is a precious resource that we
must conserve and protect. My neighbor and masterful
gardener Royce has regularly collected rainwater from her
roof for over 30 years. Her plants are incredible and thrive
on the raindrops she wisely gathers.

Please save these dates:
Heritage Festival on the Athens Square- September 13

Fall Festival and Black-Eyed Pea Cooking Contest at East
Texas Arboretum - October 11

HCMG Fall Conference- November 8

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, July 16 downstairs
at the East Texas Arboretum. See you then or any
Monday late afternoon in the DREAM Garden.

Water-Hyacinth – A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Sally Keenan

Recently we were out cruising on Cedar Creek Lake and
came upon a large number of green globs floating free on
the lake's surface. We plucked one out to be sure, and

yes, it was definitely a water-hyacinth. These interesting
but very aggressive water plants are illegal to own or
purchase in Texas. They are a scourge to lakes and
waterways.

The water-hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*) is a member of
the pickerelweed family. It was originally brought to
Louisiana from tropical Brazil in the late nineteenth
century. It has a lovely violet-purple bloom which
encouraged its wide distribution. But watch out! Water-
hyacinths are also considered the worst aquatic plants in
the world because of their incredible ability to proliferate.

The water-hyacinth has a distinctive appearance that is
easily recognized. It is free floating on the surface of the
water. The shiny green leaves are oval to round and are
held up from the plant to act like little sails. Their leaf
stalks are thick and spongy with bulbous areas near the
roots that are filled with air to keep the plant buoyant.
Below the surface is a dense mat of fine roots that look
like fine feathers. The flowers which appear in late
summer are purple to lilac with a spot of yellow.

The characteristic that makes water-hyacinths a terrible
scourge is that they reproduce dramatically by both seed
and by budding and stolen production. The second
process is more aggressive. Daughters can arise from the
runners and double in as little as 6 days. Seeds can
germinate rapidly or remain dormant for many years. The
plants grow in number and density to produce a dense
floating mat. Once a mat is formed the plants also begin
to increase in size. The result is a huge thick mat that
chokes out other forms of plants and depletes the water of
oxygen necessary for fish and other life forms. Later as it
dies back in cold weather it leaves a huge mass of rotting
material in the bottom of the lake or stream. This leaves
huge deposits of solid material to build up on the bottoms
of waterways. The dense mats of water-hyacinths create
dams along rivers and creeks increasing chances of
flooding. They also provide a great breeding ground for
mosquitoes. All that is bad news.

Water-hyacinths can be controlled by harvesting, by
herbicides or by biological controls. All these methods are
expensive and labor intensive. The best management
technique is not to let the plant get started. Several days
after we first noticed the water-hyacinths floating on the
lake Joe and I noticed several begin to float into our inlet.
We got out a net and scooped them out of the channel.

Once removed they were burned. We strongly encourage everyone to be on the lookout for these pests and to remove them before they have a chance to create a real problem on any of our local waterways.

Soil Preparation And Fertilization

Rick Hirsch
Country Extension Agent
Henderson County

If you made a mistake by not properly preparing your garden soil last spring, now is the time to correct it. This should be done before establishing the fall garden, because soil problems encountered during the spring growing season can be expected in the fall also.

Adding liberal amounts of organic matter to all types of garden soils is a highly recommended practice. Hay, compost, rotted grass clippings or leaves applied to the garden surface 2 to 3 inches deep and tilled or worked into the soil greatly improves sands or clays.

Heavy clay soils which are sticky when wet and hard as a brick when dry are much easier to cultivate if a washed, coarse sand is added. Use a washed-type sand to insure calcium carbonate removal, which makes alkaline soils even more alkaline. Add 3 inches of sand to the garden surface if the soil is to be tilled to a 10-inch depth.

In many areas of East Texas acid soils are common and often can be a problem. Add lime to these soils to bring the soil pH up to a satisfactory range. Generally about ½ to 1 pound of lime per 100 square feet of garden area worked into the soil along with fertilizer will correct most acidity problems. Use the lower rate if your soil is sandy. Wood ashes also are alkaline and can be used in small amounts to raise the soil pH.

Never add lime or wood ashes to alkaline soils. Add 5 pounds of sulfur per 100 square feet annually to provide a temporary pH reduction. Use iron sulfate or a chelated iron product in the soil to prevent plant yellowing (iron chlorosis) caused by lack of iron.

Add fertilizer for the fall crop because spring fertilization has washed out of the soil or been used for plant growth. Use a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-5, 15-10-10 or 16-20-0 at a rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet. If manures

are used 20 to 50 pounds per 100 square feet should be adequate. Incorporate fresh manure into the soil several weeks before planting.

Thoroughly pulverize soils at least 10 inches deep. Mix the above ingredients into the garden area and add nematicide if necessary. A properly prepared soil insures a successful fall flower and vegetable garden rather than a disappointing failure.

Additional amounts of fertilizer are needed later in the season to insure optimum plant growth and production. Add 1½ ounces (3 tablespoons) of ammonium sulfate per 10 feet of row to cucumbers, cantaloupes, eggplants, okra, peas and beans, peppers, squash and tomatoes after the first fruits are set, after the first harvest and every 3 to 4 weeks thereafter.

Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, lettuce, mustard, spinach and turnip greens require 1½ to 2 ounces (4 tablespoons) of ammonium sulfate per 10 feet of row 2 weeks after transplanting or 4 weeks after sowing seed.

Flowering annuals require 2 ounces (4 tablespoons) of ammonium sulfate every 4 to 8 weeks for the life of the plants. Sandy soils need more frequent fertilization than heavy clay soil.

Crops such as beets, carrots, potatoes, radishes, turnips and watermelons usually do not need additional fertilization. Excessive amounts of nitrogen reduce yields or lower quality or both.

Hydrangeas Sally Keenan

Hydrangeas originated in Japan and the Far East and are members of the saxifrage family. The name is derived from Greek and means water vessel. For many years it has been a favorite both as a florist plant and a landscape plant.

French hydrangeas, *Hydrangea macrophylla*, are available in cultivar groups with the charming names, mopheads and lacecaps. The names alone are reminiscent of grandmothers and old-fashioned gardens. Mopheads have large rounded flower heads that look like pompoms. Lacecaps have flat round flowers resembling pinwheels. Only a small central portion of the flower is fertile; the larger outer ring is sterile.

Hydrangeas are summer flowering plants needing protection from the afternoon sun. They work well in Texas gardens as under-story plants to add color and texture. They range in size from as short as 1 to 3 feet to as tall as thirty feet. It is important to choose a variety of the right size for its designated location. Hydrangeas like soil rich in hummus, and they don't like to get dry. They are easily stressed from lack of moisture. Avoid hot, dry or exposed locations for these garden beauties.

One interesting aspects about them is that the color of the blossoms is dependent on the acidity of the soil. Horticulturists use the chemist's pH scale to measure the range from



acid to base. A pH of 1 is highly acidic while a pH of 11 is extremely basic or alkaline. As is the case with the Richter scale used by geologist, a small change means a lot since both scales are based on logarithms. In acid soil



with the pH between 4.5 and 5.5 the flowers of the hydrangeas are blue. In neutral to alkaline soil with the pH between 6.5 and 7.5 the blooms are pink to light red.

Above 7.5 the plants develop chlorotic leaves and grow poorly. To change the color from pink to blue add wettable sulphur and water. To make the flowers pink broadcast lime. It generally takes a year to see a noticeable change in color after the soil is treated.

Big leaf hydrangeas form buds for the next year in late summer. It is important to prune and remove old flowerheads before August 1 to ensure the next years fluorescence. Winter injury and late pruning are two of the most likely reasons for failure to blossom. During the cold months it is helpful to keep hydrangeas well mulched to protect them from severe cold that is likely to damage the buds.

Hydrangeas make lovely additions to dried flower arrangements. This is a way to extend your enjoyment even farther. I have read that it is best not to pick the hydrangeas at their peak of flowering. They seem to dry better if they are cut slightly after their prime and allowed to dry in a cool location. Although you may wish to hang them upside-down it is not absolutely necessary unless the stems are weak.

With a little care hydrangeas can provide long lasting color to Texas gardens and material for winter enjoyment.

Herbal Vinegar

Carol Atfield

The use of herb vinegars is increasing and their popularity has been well established. Herb vinegars give salads a new flavor. In bottling your own her vinegars, dress them up with a bottle that is distinctive. They make wonderful gifts.

Making herb vinegars is a simple process. Here are two very different methods.

Method One

Take freshly washed and dried herb leaves and bruise them with a wooden mallet. Place them in a large non-metallic container and pour hot vinegar over the foliage. Cover tightly and allow to steep in a warm dark place for three weeks, stirring the mixture every day. Do not oversteep.

When this process is complete, strain the mixture through three thicknesses of cheesecloth or two coffee filters. Repeat the process until the vinegar is clear. Bottle the vinegar in sterile bottles with a non metallic cap or cork. Add a sprig or two of your fresh herb, a hot pepper or garlic for good appearance. Store the bottles in a cool dark place.

Method Two

Select bottles that can be tightly sealed with a cork or screwtop. Bottles must be scrupulously clean. Place fresh, clean herbs in bottle and cover with wine vinegar. Seal tightly and refrigerate for two weeks. Strain with cheesecloth into a clean bottle and refrigerate for up to six months.

Uses For Herbal Vinegars

ROSEMARY: pork or lamb marinade; tomato and cucumber salad; orange and onion salad; fried potatoes.

TARRAGON: chicken, crab, or tuna salad. Chicken gravy; hollandaise and béarnaise sauces; peas.

OREGANO: scrambled eggs; salads; pizza.

MINT: stir into mayonnaise or whipped cream for fruit salad; lamb sauce; fruit punch.

LEMON THYME: mayonnaise; fish and fish salads; stir fry vegetables.

CHIVES: egg salad; broccoli.

Henderson County Master Gardener

<http://agfacts.tamu.edu/D5/Henderso/hc-mg.htm>
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**Henderson County
Master Gardeners Association
101 East Tyler Street
Athens, TX 75751-2547
Phone: 903-675-6130
Fax: 903-677-7222**

The Henderson County Master Gardener Association is sponsored by the Henderson County Cooperative Extension Service which is a part of the Texas A&M University System. Its objectives are to increase knowledge of gardening to its members and the general public, and to provide the community with information on good gardening practices.

If you have received this newsletter in error, or to provide us with a change of address, please contact the Henderson County Extension Office at (903)-675-6130.