

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Rain Lilies Aptly Named

Nina Ellis

The first rains following two months of brutal dry summer days brought us the miracle of myriad rain lilies blooming on roadsides, gardens, cemeteries, worn out pastures and lawns. These little bulbs are members of the tropical amaryllis family. The most familiar is *Zephyranthes candida*, with bright green rush-like foliage and starry white blossoms. It has naturalized in much of the South, is not particular about soil and does well in dry or wet conditions. The large bright pink blossoms, (over three inches across), of *Z. grandiflora* are a true garden



favorite. These bulbs demand a rich soil with added fertilizer to do their best. They are winter hardy here in our area of Texas, although mulching will protect them from hard freezes. The third rain lily you will see covering large swaths of worn-out fields, lawns and roadsides is *Z. citrina* blooming with small bright golden trumpets. It is one of the easiest to grow in dry gardens. It makes lots of seed and spreads rapidly, but it never becomes a problem in beds or naturalized in lawns. All of these bulbs thrive in our garden, as they need to be baked in the sun to put on their late summer and fall display.

One of my favorites is *Z. drummondii* or giant prairie lily, native to Central Texas. With lush sage green foliage, large white waxy blossoms with a pleasing fragrance, they have made a statement in my garden.

These bulbs seem to know the difference between water from a garden hose and a thunderstorm. Five days after receiving rain a miracle happens as the buds push up from the replenished soil. Some people call this “rain lily day”. Some cultivars will bloom sporadically during the summer but the real show begins with a drenching thunderstorm or a Gulf hurricane. Many bulbs will continue to bloom sporadically until frost.

There are many cultivars and hybrids available to the gardener, all shades of pink, cream, apricot and white. Culture of these bulbs is straightforward, i.e. give them a place near the front of the garden bed where they can remain for many years, add compost to the soil and fertilize occasionally with an organic formulation. Do not plant them where they will receive supplemental water, as they need to be dry during the heat of summer.

When these bulbs are purchased from a nursery they are usually seedlings in pots. Plant them in groups as they come from the pot. It may take several seasons for them to bloom but do not despair – one day after a blessed late summer rain you will come upon a dazzling display of rain lilies restoring your faith in gardening.

If you would like more information about Rain Lilies look for “Garden Bulbs For The South” by Scott Ogden published by Timber Press.

Hummingbirds in Texas

Jane Fox

My earliest memory of hummingbirds is as a young child walking out in my front yard in Waco, Texas, and seeing a zillion hummingbirds around the mimosa tree. I remember just standing in awe as I looked at those little things doing what they do and being totally amazed. Today, 50 years later, I am still amazed. I sit at my computer in my office and look out and see no less than a dozen fighting at the feeder outside the window. I dutifully make a gallon of nectar every other day this time of year. Finally, I decided to learn some more about them. As a retired teacher, I call them my second graders...they fight and don't even know why. Of course, there is always the bully.

My favorite, the ruby-throated hummingbird is the tiniest of all birds with its iridescent coloring and long needle-like bill for sipping from flowers. It is by far the most numerous of hummingbirds in the eastern half of Texas. All hummers have a unique interdependence with certain flowers. They need the nectar and the flowers need to be pollinated.

Hummingbirds compete for nectar and insects. They guard their territories fiercely. They must feed every 10 minutes or so all day, and they may consume 2/3 of their body weight in a single day. A major part of a



hummingbird's diet is sugar. They get it from flower nectar and tree sap. Hummers also need protein to build muscles, so they eat insects in the air and also from leaves and spider webs.

Hummingbirds are extremely smart. A hummingbird's brain is larger in comparison to body size than any other bird. They have a terrific memory. They know every flower in their territory and how long it will take each flower to refill. They remember year to year, where each and every hummingbird feeder is, both home and along a migration path. They also learn which people are the ones responsible for filling hummingbird feeders, and which ones don't. These are just smart little birds.

Therefore, for those of us who enjoy both gardening and bird watching, it is fortunate that there's such a plenitude of plants for attracting hummingbirds. We needn't sacrifice landscaping beauty in order to attract hummers. The variety of plants for attracting hummingbirds is so great that you could be building a landscape that is envied

by the neighbors. The color red is notorious for attracting hummingbirds, but you are not limited to using only red flowers. In the list that will be given, you will see purple, white, orange, pink and blue. They are all rich in nectar that makes them excellent hummingbird food. Neither is the diversity of plants restricted to type. Annuals and perennials, vines, shrubs, trees, bedding plants and hanging plants can all be considered when selecting plants that will attract hummers. Mature trees with a thick canopy are important nesting and escape features in your garden.

Planting hummingbird friendly plants around your garden is one sure way to attract these birds. Typical hummingbird friendly plants are going to have flowers that are: trumpet shaped, long necked, good-nectar producers, bright colored, long blooming.

While some non-native plants may do well in your garden, you should consider the impact these plants may have on our native Texas landscape and our native plants.

Consider these plants suggested by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department when designing your garden:

Trees: Mimosa

Shrubs: Azaleas

Vines: Honeysuckle, Trumpet Vine, Morning Glory

Annuals: Red Salvia, Naturtium, Nicotiana (Flowering Tobacco), Lantana, Impatiens, Petunia, Geranium, Begonia

Perennials: Hibiscus, Day Lily, Lily, Phlox

The nectar needs of these birds can be supplemented by a clean, well maintained hummingbird feeder. The best are going to be easy to assemble and disassemble for cleaning. They should also be free of sharp corners or other small areas where mold and bacteria can collect. Feeders with a perch often offer the best opportunities for these birds to accumulate needed fat reserves before and during migration.

However you design your garden keep in mind the awe on the face of all of us as we stop and admire these wonderful marvels. I just don't know anyone who doesn't stop and watch as these birds show off their unique flying abilities as they hover, fly backwards, and maneuver from side to side. Let's protect them and provide them a garden rich in their needs, avoiding the use of insecticides anywhere near your hummingbird garden. Let's get ready for next year's crop of old and new friends.

Calling All Cooks: Celebrate the Pea!

Michael Sambogna

The annual Black Eyed Pea Cooking Contest will be held at the East Texas Arboretum on Saturday, October 11 during the Fall Festival. Cash and other prizes will be awarded to the winning contestants in several categories including appetizers, salads, main dishes.

Contestants must pre-register and send in their recipes for inclusion in our cookbook- ReciPeas! For more information please call the Arboretum at 903-675-5630 or the registration form may be downloaded from our website www.eastexasarboretum.org.

The public is invited to view the judging, and Pea Plates will again be sold at noon under the Pavilion at ETABS. Everyone is invited to enter a pea recipe to celebrate our Pea heritage in Henderson County at ETABS' Fall Festival 2008!

Rose Propagation

Sally Marks

When I first visited my niece's newly purchased home I discovered the most perfect pale pink miniature rose in the back alley. The rose bush was to be an exclusion in the seller's real estate contract; it had belonged to the owner's grandmother. However the bush was large so they reluctantly made the decision that it was too burdensome to transplant to their new location.

I took one small cutting with a tiny blossom and a bud with me on the drive back to Athens from Dallas. The interior of my car smelled as if I were in Culpepper's in London. I had to have this rose! Nine cuttings later I still do not have that rose, but now there is hope. Nina Ellis, who is an extraordinary horticulturist and master gardener as well was kind enough to share her rose cutting expertise with me. I feel encouraged!

Nina Ellis' Rose Cutting Recipe.

Get your supplies ready—a plastic bag, paper towel, some water, and sharp pruners for cutting and transporting the rose to the site where the planting will be done. Then your will need six inch pots, a rooting hormone, potting soil, identification tags and a hand trowel.

1. Remove a cutting from new growth of semi-hard wood. Cut it from a branch that has recently bloomed because that is where the food is.

2. The new cutting should be about six inches long. Cut the dried end back to about four inches when you pot the new cutting. There must be at least two buds below ground and two buds above ground when you plant it in the new pot.

3. Use a good potting media. It should be about 2/3 soil and 1/3 perlite. The potting media should be moist, not wet. Place the potting media in a six-inch pot and tamp it down. Use a pencil to make holes in the pot. Nina usually puts about three cutting in each six inch pot. The holes should be about three inches deep.

4. Remove the large leaves from the cuttings. Remove the dry end from the cutting; then dip it into a root stimulator. Place the cutting in the hole made by a pencil; then firm it up with you hand.

5. Put a stick in the pot or something that will act as a support for a plastic bag to keep the plastic off of the cutting. A "Baggie" works well as a tent to hold moisture in over the cutting. Simply tuck the baggie under the bottom of the pot. Be sure you place an identification tag in your pot with the cutting.

6. Place container with the cutting in bright light, but not full sun—possibly on a picnic table under a tree with a southern exposure as Nina does in her yard. She leaves the pots at the back of her house with this southern exposure. Do not water them. New growth should appear in about a month. When several new leaves appear remove the plastic and place the pot in a sunny spot out of the wind. When the cutting has hardened off, it may be placed in the ground or moved to a larger pot.

7. This final step is mine—cross your fingers and think positive thoughts!

Future Growth: Plant Propagation And Vegetable Garden Planning

Karla Odom

Want to increase your plant population without spending your hard-earned money at a plant nursery? How about growing your own vegetables -- also saving money and

involving the whole family in a worthwhile endeavor? On Saturday, November 8, you'll have an opportunity to hear two of Henderson County's Master Gardeners speak on each subject.

Nina Ellis will teach us the basics of plant propagation with emphasis on seeds and rose cuttings. Nina has several years of experience collecting and sowing native plant seeds, and also is quite the expert in propagating roses. She will be demonstrating the techniques that have helped her to be successful, and will be available to answer the many questions the participants will have.

Elmer Belssner has been growing vegetables in Henderson County for 30 years and is enthusiastic about sharing what has worked for him. As with most any project, basic planning and preparation is key to successful gardening. Therefore, Elmer will help us lay the "groundwork" as he explains site selection, bed design, and soil preparation that will have the gardener harvesting a wonderful bounty of vegetables next spring and summer.

The Henderson County Master Gardeners Fall Conference will be presented free of charge to any one interested in these topics. It will be held at the East Texas Arboretum on November 8, 2008 from 9:00-12:00. All those who like to dig in the dirt are welcome!

Empire State Muffins

Linda Benton

2 cups shredded apples, unpeeled
1 1/3 c. sugar
1 c. raisins
1 c. shredded carrots
1 c. walnuts or pecans
2 1/2 c. all purpose flour
1 T. baking powder
2 t. baking soda
1/2 t. salt
2 t. ground cinnamon
2 eggs, beaten
1/2 c. vegetable oil

In a large bowl combine apples and sugar. Gently fold in raisins, carrots, and nuts. Combine dry ingredients; add to mixing bowl. Mix well to moisten dry ingredients. Combine eggs and oil. Stir into apple mixture. Fill 18

greased muffin tins 2/3 full. Bake at 375 degrees for 20-25 minutes. Cool 5 minutes before removing from tins.

Herb Berry Salad

Carol Atfield

3 pints ripe strawberries, washed and hulled
1 pint blueberries, rinsed
1 pint blackberries, rinsed
1 pint raspberries, picked over
2 T unsweetened apple juice concentrate, thawed
2 T freshly squeezed orange juice
2 T finely grated orange zest
1/4 cup chopped mint leaves
8 fresh mint sprigs
1 cup nonfat plain yogurt, optional

Cut strawberries into quarters. Place in large bowl with other berries. Mix apple juice, orange juice, zest and chopped mint together. Gently toss with berries. Folding from underneath with a rubber spatula to avoid bruising. Let rest at room temperature 1-2 hours before serving. Garnish with mint sprigs and yogurt if desired.

HERB SALTS

Use less salt and get more flavor by grinding dry herbs with sea salt. Fresh herbs may also be used; bake at 200 degrees for 40-60 minutes, stirring frequently.

Fall A Time for Planting Trees

Sally Keenan

We're getting to a time of year that is ideal for planting trees. Cooler weather is here and newly planted trees will have plenty of time to get their roots established before the hot summer sun returns.

Fall is also an ideal time to do some research on trees before making selections. Nature is preparing for her glorious fall display. It will be a great opportunity to go out and have a look at various species to find those with the most vibrant colors to add to your landscape.

The East Texas Arboretum in Athens is a good place to start looking. On one of these fine Saturdays a walk along the nature trails will provide a good view of many native Texas trees. Tyler State Park is also a good place for an outing to observe Texas trees and foliage.

There are two trees in particular that I think deserve special attention for those wanting to add to the fall splendor in their yards. One is the red oak and the other is the possum-haw holly. Both these trees provide wonderful color to the fall landscape.

The red oak is a large shade tree growing up to 100 feet tall with a diameter of two to three feet. It is best to choose a red oak for planting in the fall after the leaves have started to turn to ensure that you have a colorful tree. Nurseries should have a good selection now. All trees respond to deep watering but the red oak does not like to be “wet”. Be careful not to plant one too close to a creek, pond or lakeshore.



The second tree that I think deserves attention is the possum-haw holly. This is a small tree or large shrub that can be planted in the full sun or used as an under story tree in dappled shade. The possum-haw holly has small green leaves throughout the growing season. In fact, it looks a lot like a yaupon holly. In the autumn the leaves fall

and the female trees are left covered with bright red, orange or yellow berries. They provide not only color but also an interesting texture in the landscape. The berries remain on the branches all winter unless they are discovered by a variety of birds that find them delectable. This is another good tree to plant in the fall to ensure that your choice is a female. Possum-haw seem to like to grow along fence rows. If you know a farmer who would be willing to let you dig one up they are very hardy and quite easy to transplant.



Observing trees throughout the growing season helps in choosing a variety of species that provide beauty and color throughout the year.

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<http://agfacts.tamu.edu/D5/Henderso/hc-mg.htm>
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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.