

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Wildflowers Are My Passion

Wayne Stafford

One wildflower season has just ended, and I am looking forward to what the new year will bring. Most master gardeners are looking at their seed catalogs and wondering what new selections the nurseries will have in stock. I just take what the good Lord plants each year and collect pictures of his offerings.

You have gathered that I am a wildflower lover. This past year I made pictures of over 200 different varieties of flowers in Henderson and Anderson counties.



They range from the tiny Virginia springbeauty to the tall rugged sunflower, and roughstem rosinweed.

I travel the back roads from Athens often going south to the Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area (WMA) between Blackfoot and Bethel just over in Anderson County. This preserve of almost 11,000 acres is home for a wide variety of plants and wildflowers. The soils range from bottom lands along Catfish Creek, to bogs, sloughs and dry deep sand each one producing plants unique to the soil type. Dirt roads allow you to walk or drive to find a variety of plants.

Another good place to search is east of Montalba where the red hills and sandy soils encourage some wonderful plants including standing cypress, scarlet beardtongue, or smooth twistflower. Old cemeteries that are not mowed on a regular basis accommodate an array of wildflowers. Keep your eyes open, and you will develop a sense for finding wildflowers.

Don't forget to look in your own back yard or neighborhood. After I started taking wildflower pictures I found several beautiful small flowers there. Very small flowers make some of the most wonderful photographs.

To be successful in wildflower photography, you have to be dedicated to going each week. Some of the flowers are only at their prime for a short time. Another thing that makes this important is the State and County mowing crews often cut down the flowers before they fully bloom or before the seed crop has had time to mature.

And when you find a beautiful wildflower, note its location so you will remember how to find it next year. However, one thing I have noticed with wild flowers is that they often will not come back in the same area each year. I believe this is due to the varied moisture conditions from one year to the next. Don't give up! Keep looking! You will find something new and interesting.

I find the wildflower season may start earlier than you might think, even in the cold winter months, and it lasts just up to the first frost of the year. Fragrant sumac, a small shrub that has the pretty red berries, will have blooms before any leaves appear. The same is true of the sassafras tree. Both bloom by mid March. At the other end of the year there are several varieties of asters, that are late bloomers. Rice button aster, calico aster, late purple aster, and barrens silky aster bloom in October. So go hunting often and regularly; you will find something blooming.

Some good sources of information about the plants of the area can be found at:

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_0010n.pdf

for the Engeling WMA. This contains a listing of the flora found on the Engeling WMA. Another excellent source for local wildflower identification is <http://artemis.austincollege.edu/acad/bio/gdiggs/NCTXpdf> which has Shinners and Mahler's Illustrated Flora of North Central Texas. Both of these sources can be viewed online.

If you are taking pictures for identification, it is best to take pictures of the basal leaves, a close up of the flower, the back side of the flower with as much detail as possible as a aid to identification.

Another useful tool is the United States Department of Agriculture plant index, at: <http://plants.usda.gov> which gives the common names, scientific names, and the USDA symbol for the plant. I have found their symbol system to be a very useful basis to index flower photographs. For example, to label purple false foxglove, *Agalinis purpurea*, use the USDA symbol, AGPU5. I use the symbol "AGPU5" as a key, then add a "-digit" on the end to identify each additional picture.



Another great tool is the USDA plant index. It gives a map of Texas showing an outline of the various counties in Texas where a particular plant will grow. If the plant is found in Anderson or Henderson counties the county will be coded in green showing it to be found in those counties.

The first photo shown is Purple pleat-leaf, *Alophia drummondii*, ALDR2. The second photo is Purple false foxglove, *Agalinis purpurea*, AGPU5.

Nutsedge

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For those of you who don't know what nutsedge is imagine your worst weed and double it. This is a sedge even though it looks like a grass. This alone makes it difficult to control since most farmers think it is a grass and complain when grass-specific herbicides are not effective. It multiplies by sending rhizomes and nut-like storage structures underground. I have seen nutsedge plants that are 4" tall but with a rhizome twice as long underground. For every seedling you remove there are another 100 nuts waiting to germinate. That's why control of this weed is a very long-term activity.

I have sprayed with Roundup to kill a solid cover of nutsedge, yet within 3-4 months the solid cover was back (not from the crowns of the dead plants, but from dormant

nuts underground that emerged since the last spray). The bottom line is don't give up, don't let it grow past 4" tall, and keep at it until the nutsedge underground reserves are exhausted.

As a teenager in my home garden, I had to sift the top 8" of soil and manually remove every nut I could see in order to get a control hold on that weed. It was a small garden bed; that's why I did this manually. It was before Roundup was available for homeowners.

Roundup is the only available herbicide for homeowners that controls nutsedge. Remember that any herbicide, especially Roundup, has to be applied to actively growing weeds to get the best results. So, in the early spring when temperatures are not too hot and weeds are growing like crazy, directed/shielded application of Roundup on a weekly basis is probably the best solution available. Do not apply herbicides when weeds are stressed from excessive heat or lack of moisture. The herbicides won't be that effective then.

I saw a 2.5-gallon jug at Lowes selling for \$140. In addition, a whole slew of smaller containers and RTU (ready to use) products available at much cheaper price. However, that 2.5-gallon jug is the most cost effective of the whole bunch, because of its 40% active ingredient formulation. A 2.5 gallon jug at 40% solution, will make 50 gallons of 2% mixed solutions for use. That's about \$3/gallon cost. Compare that to a \$10 bottle of 1 gallon RTU formulation.

Most homeowners are afraid to use Roundup and I don't blame them. Roundup is a systemic herbicide and a small amount of drift on young tender vegetables will kill them. Older plants, such as tomato, are more forgiving. They will show definite yellowing, as an injury symptom, but will not die if the drift amount is small. But with proper equipment and application with shielded boom any person can become an expert applicator. The easiest shield I have seen many homeowners use is a 1-gallon milk jug that had the bottom cut off and taped at the neck around the nozzle.

Flower Bed Gardening

Lois Mallette

For years I had a small vegetable garden in the back corner of my yard. Over time my neighbor's trees grew large and my garden area became too shady to produce any crops.

The only areas with adequate sun were the flowerbeds located along the back patio and a narrow bed across the front of the house.

Two years ago I put in four fan-shaped trellises in the back bed and trained tomatoes to climb on them. I planted peppers and bush beans along with the zinnias and marigolds. With a few basil plants, dill and eggplants tucked in with bachelor buttons, it grew to be a very productive vegetable garden that looked like a flowerbed. From a distance the tomatoes looked like roses growing on the trellises. In the front bed I planted zucchini and yellow squash with coleus. Italian parsley and cilantro were planted to form a border for the bed.

In the fall cabbage and broccoli were planted with sweet alyssum, chrysanthemum and snapdragons. This fall garden extended my growing season for vegetables into the winter.

This was a very different strategy for a vegetable garden. You not only get a vegetable garden but also an ecstatically beautiful flowerbed where all the plants seem to complement each other. If you have a small space and want fresh vegetables, plant a few in your flowerbeds.

Pruning Chores In The Landscape

Rick Hirsch
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Late winter is the time to complete most pruning chores around the landscape. The fastest period of wound healing is in the spring so pruning done now will soon be on its way to healing.

Pruning cuts are often done incorrectly. Leaving a stub results in a dead piece of branch that prevents the wound from being able to close. The dead stub becomes a route for decay to enter the tree. Cutting flush up against the trunk or another branch removes the natural collar around the branch that results in fast healing. It also creates a larger wound than is necessary. Thus it takes a lot longer for the wound to heal.

Different plants often require different pruning techniques. Factors such as deciduous, evergreen, spring blooming, upright shrubs and arching shrubs, all impact the type and timing of pruning. There are many resources online and

from your local Extension office to illustrate proper pruning practices. Take advantage of these cold days to brush up on your knowledge before heading outside to prune.

As a general rule, if an ornamental plant blooms only in the spring wait to prune it until after the blooms are gone. Otherwise late winter is the time to get the job done.

Fruit trees, especially peach trees, should be pruned as late in the dormant season as possible. If peach trees are pruned before they are totally dormant, they may be subject to bacterial canker and a complex called peach tree short-life. When bacterial canker and short life occur, trees die shortly after blooming in the spring.

Just because the leaves are off the trees does not mean that the tree is totally dormant. During warm spells complete dormancy may be delayed.

By waiting as long into the dormant season as possible to prune, injury sites are exposed less time to insects and disease before healing begins. Late January and February is usually ideal for Henderson County. The tree should be totally dormant this late in the winter.

One other thing to remember is that three to seven year-old trees are most enjoyable to peach tree short-life. Therefore, producers with large orchards who cannot delay pruning until February should begin the pruning operation with trees older than seven years. This will allow the most susceptible trees to be pruned last, thus reducing the chance of infection.

This is also a good time to plant woody ornamental trees, shrubs and vines. The sooner you get them in the longer they have to establish roots into the surrounding soil so that when hot dry weather arrives they have a better chance of survival. As with pruning, planting can be done correctly or incorrectly. There is plenty of information available to help you do it right. This will help protect your investment in time and money.

Go Native In Your Texas Garden!

Margaret Rands

Do you love Texas? Of course! So bring a little Texas home to your yard. Use Texas native plants in your home landscape.

There are many advantages to using native plants. East Texas plants are designed to live here — they thrive in the heat, humidity, and soils of East Texas. Native plant landscapes can save money and time, because they generally require less care once they are established — less water, fertilizer, and pest control. Native plants are more likely to thrive than less acclimated exotic plants. Add this to the fact that native plants are beautiful and you have many great reasons to use native plants in your garden.

Native plants are good choices for our Texas environment. Since so much of Texas is developed in one way or another - cities and towns, roads, ranches and farms - bringing native plants home can make an important contribution to the survival of native-plant species and to the survival of wildlife that relies on native plants for food and shelter. Increasing the diversity of plants encourages a broader range of insects and birds. Greater diversity encourages a healthier environment for all. Growing food for our native critters is a worthwhile secondary goal for a home landscape.

Planting natives can help bridge the gap between natural spaces and developed areas. The National Wildlife Federation encourages gardeners to garden for wildlife explaining, “Gardening for wildlife means you’ll get to see beautiful butterflies and birds as well as have a vibrant yard filled with native plants.” Note that it is important to minimize the use of pesticides in a wildlife garden. Tips on gardening for butterflies, birds, amphibians, and other gardening topics are available at <http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife>.

Resources:

The Native Plant Society of Texas provides links to lists of plants with photographs and descriptions at <http://www.npsot.org>,

see the Table of Contents page. You can also find a link to our local chapter, The Native Plant Society of Tyler, which hosts educational meetings and field trips.

The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center provides lists



of recommended native plants by region with photographs and descriptions at www.wildflower.org/collections

For general horticultural information on many plants great for Texas gardens, including native plants, see <http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/web.html>. You can also call our local Agricultural Extension office and the Master Gardeners at 903-675-6130.

Tomato Growing as Experienced by a Beginner

Rich Watson

I found that growing tomatoes in East Texas is a heck of a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. I discovered through trial and error that ripe delicious fruit is easy to do, as well as fun and rewarding.

Last summer we moved to Mabank, East Texas from Western Washington, a state rich in dark fertile soil. Here in Texas I found only dense sandy soil and clay. This was new to me. I have for years prided myself on having the best tomatoes for miles in any direction. After I faced difficulty seeding any plants in small plots of fertilized native soil with plenty of water, I decided to take it to a whole different level. I decided to do small raised beds and pots with less than 30 percent native soil and 70 percent rich black topsoil. It may not be feasible for those of you looking for huge quantities or commercial sales, but in small doses it works great. I used very small amounts of fertilizer, plenty of morning watering, and structure for the plants to grow on and spread themselves naturally without breaking.

Tricks for care: Honestly I found the best way to water was in the morning with a good soaking. I would also spray the leaves in the later evenings with a regular spray bottle keeping them as free of dust as possible while inspecting for bugs. I tried to maintain several flats of assorted flowers as well to encourage bees to stay close by and assist in pollination. When fruit begins showing I like to check it as often as I can find the time. I avoid handling the fruit, and remove any bug-damaged fruit immediately. I spray an organic bug spray every four to five days in a fine mist well below the recommended levels as per the label. I also separate any plants that appear to be suffering disease quickly to avoid the risk of the disease spreading.

Tricks for Harvest: I found this past season that you must pick fruit as soon as it becomes ripe and avoid leaving them out in the burning hot sun. Picking the fruit at first sign of ripeness lowers the risk the “mush” effect on larger tomatoes and lowers risk of fruit loss to predators like birds. If you like smaller tomatoes these small tips may work for you. I found that the earlier picking adds to the flavor and shelf life once removed from the vine. Oh yeah, unless you are making your own salsa or marinara, my best suggestion for the grape Roma tomatoes are to get them sliced, salted and eaten immediately.

Disclaimer: These methods may or may not be right for your area; trial and error is the best way to go. I have not yet tried to grow the Heirlooms or Big Boys yet. Maybe next year I’ll pop in and let you know how they turn out when I do.

Harvesting Winter Vegetables

Sally Keenan

Cabbage

Begin to harvest cabbage when the heads are firm and the size of a softball. Cabbage should be harvested when the head is firm and tight, before it has a chance to crack and split. Splitting is caused by excessive water uptake. Splitting of mature heads can be prevented by pulling the plant gently upward and twisting slightly. This will break some roots and lessen water uptake. After harvest remove the loose outer leaves. Refrigerated cabbage can be stored for up to 2 months.

Broccoli

Broccoli heads should be harvested while the florets are tight and green, but before small yellow flowers begin to appear. The central head may be as large as 6-7 inches in diameter. After the main head has been cut lateral side heads will develop in the axils of the leaves. These will be smaller, one to two inches across.



Brussels Sprouts

Unlike cabbage which produces one large head, Brussels sprouts produce many small heads. When the sprouts are firm begin at the bottom and pick the lowest heads first. As the lower ones are picked more will develop at the top. Start harvesting the sprouts before the lower leaves turn yellow. Sprouts can tolerate several freezes. Once harvested they will keep refrigerated up to 3 weeks.

Cauliflower

Cauliflower heads that have been exposed to light turn cream colored and develop a coarse texture. To produce high quality white cauliflower tie the outer leaves of the plant above the head when the heads are two or 3 inches in diameter. The leaves may be tied over the head with cloth strips or with twine. By excluding light, or blanching the heads, the cauliflower will remain more tender and white. Harvest the heads while they are smooth, firm and compact. Heads that have begun to open will be “ricey.” Cauliflower can be stored refrigerated for up to two weeks.

Kohlrabi

Standard kohlrabi should be harvested when the swollen stems are between 2 and 3 inches in diameter. Kohlrabi larger than that is usually woody and tough. There are giant, heirloom types that may reach as much as a foot in diameter and still retain their quality. To store remove the leaves and roots and keep under refrigeration.

Kale

Periodically harvest the older, outer leaves of the kale or cut the whole plant near ground level. Store refrigerated.

Things To Do

Linda Benton

To have healthier camellia plants and to force larger blooms in winter, disbud all but one bud of every cluster. Also disbud many of the buds on weaker stems. Depending on the vigor, size and nature of the variety leave about 40 to 60 percent of the healthiest and largest buds to bloom.



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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.