

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Plant Them And They Will Come

Nina Ellis

Several years ago I became interested in planting a butterfly garden. I chose a spot in my garden that is relatively sunny, the first requirement. Next came the research involving the proper plants, both larval and nectar. Larval plants are those that need to be available for the butterfly on which to lay her eggs. It seems each species of butterfly has its own preferred larval plant. This system works. As the eggs hatch, the proper food plant is available to the larva. Once I had a list of the plants needed for the most commonly seen butterflies in our area, I set out to purchase them. This quest proved to be the most difficult in establishing the garden.



I needed fennel, dill, parsley and carrots for the various swallowtails (Tiger, Giant, Pipevine, Eastern etc.) that frequent our gardens. These were the easiest to come by. I purchased seeds, which are readily available. I did purchase plants of bronze fennel (perennial) to take up the slack as the annuals mature.

The Gulf Fritillary requires passion vine. There are many on the market, just be sure to purchase a winter-hardy perennial. Be prepared to have your plant stripped of leaves over night. That's what you hoped for, right? It is exciting to watch the eggs being deposited and see the growth of the larva from tiny caterpillar to creation of the chrysalis.

The Monarch will only lay eggs on milkweeds. There are many naturally occurring milkweeds. The problem comes in trying to purchase plants. *Asclepias tuberosa* is the most readily available. I was able to purchase several other varieties at the Stephen F. Austin plant sale and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

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The giant Sulphur requires plants of the Senna (Cassia) family, and our wild partridge pea. I was able to get seed of partridge pea from Native American Seed in Junction, Texas.

The Red Admiral's plants of choice are the nettle family, which are readily available in nearby pastures.

The Painted Lady prefers cudweed and Pussy Toes, which are also found in local pastures.

Next I turned my search to nectar plants. Research has shown that butterflies prefer to nectar on flowers made up of many tiny individual blossoms (lantana, verbena, butterfly weed or bush, etc). Nectar plants need to have as much exposure to sun as possible as the sun facilitates nectar production, the more sun, the more nectar. Nectar plants should optimally be planted in groups as opposed to a single specimen. Although butterflies see the whole spectrum of color, the preferred colors appear to be purple or lilac, pink, red, orange, yellow and white in that order.

After nurturing my butterfly garden for three seasons, I was rewarded this summer with caterpillars of Swallowtails, Monarchs, Sulphurs, Gulf Fritillaries, and Painted Ladies. If you plant for them, they will come!



If you want further information on butterflies and creating a garden for them find a copy of: “Butterfly Gardening For The South” by Geyata Ajilvsgi, published by Taylor Publishing Company and available on Amazon.

Country Girl Mums

Dodie Tucker

Most gardens start to look a little tired in the fall; particularly after the type of drought we've experienced this year. Then here come our garden mums with many

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different colors and shapes with Country Girl being my favorite. I found some interesting information on Country Girl known around the turn of the century as Ryan's Pink or Clara Curtis. The three names represent a striking pink

mum that slowly turns white as it fades. It is very easy to grow being hardy to -20 F; it needs full sun, average water (be careful not to over water), and is attractive to bees and



butterflies. Country Girl mums are easily propagated by root division or herbaceous stem cuttings. You can use them as a ground cover because of their floppy habit of growing. They only need pinching back one or two times in the summer to assure proper blooming. You should shear off the flowers as Country Girl finishes her blooming. Nothing is prettier than when she is in bloom. Get a start from a friend and you'll be enjoying them soon.

A Word from the President

Jane Fox

Now that I have relocated myself once again in Central Texas, I am trying to bring with me the knowledge that I have learned about native plants in East Texas that might work well for us here back in Central Texas. I have noticed and admired several neighborhood corners that catch your eye because of their natural native Texas beauty. With this in mind, I have explored to the best of my ability just what plants are making these city corners so eye-catching while they seem to be thriving with little or no maintenance. Along with the native Texas salvia there are many cone flowers, day lilies, and phlox. The turks' cap and desert willow offer different accents to these quaint corner gardens. Occasionally you can find a standing cypress or a crossvine that lends a special elegance to the corner.

With this in mind, we decided to minimize the native cannas and the jasmine that occupied a large portion of our city plot. We are attempting to replace those with carefully chosen vegetables, herbs, and an amazing abundance of zennias tossed out in the most haphazard of methods by a former East Texas gardener who happens to possess a most amazing green thumb. We are blessed with an abundance of multi-colored zennias that fill our gardens and our vases on a daily basis.

We have recently planted esperanza, lantana, pentas, dusty miller, and firebush. These have been powerful instruments in attracting a virtual smorgasborg of birds, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

Mother's love of caladiums has directed us to make one of the best choices of foliage because of their unique ability to thrive in both shade and sun. They rate a blue ribbon because they proved color all season long with no attention beyond your occasional watering.

Snakemouth Orchid Or Rose Pogonia Wayne Stafford

I knew this beautiful flower was growing on the Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area. After searching for about three years I was able to locate and photograph the plant. I found it in a circular open area about 200 feet wide. Water from a tiny flowing spring had created a slight cone shaped depression. There at the lower end was a snakemouth orchid.

The plant is a very delicate beautiful pink. The scientific name is, *Pogonia ophioglossoides*. The generic name *Pogonia* is derived from the Greek *pogon*, for "beard", and refers to the "bearded" appearance of the labellum. The labellum, a tongue-like protrusion serves as a landing place for pollinators. A bee goes through a difficult process to be the lucky pollinator, and gets little reward for his troubles. The margin of the labellum is fringed with tiny fleshy hairs, that are pink. The center has a darker pink at the tip, and at the upper end has a slightly yellow color. At the top are two rounded petals with a little pink button. And behind this are three oblong petals to complete the flower arrangement. The word *ophioglossoides* apparently refers to the similarity between the leaves of this species and those of the fern genus *Ophioglossum*.



The word "snakemouth" got me to thinking about my growing up on our family farm. When I first encountered a snake as a child I noticed the way they would stick out their forked tongue, straight out a couple of times. I later learned that this forked tongue is a sensory device, of

taste, smell, and direction. In the roof of its mouth a snake has two sensory glands. Each time it pulls the tongue back in its mouth it places the tongue in the gland. This tells it what is near, and in what direction it may be located.

After initially testing of the air, the snake made a series of short probes with the tongue, right in my direction. This sensory ability is what enables a snake to hunt its prey in the dark of night. However, even as small boy I knew he was pointing directly at me. It sure scared a 6-year old boy, and made him wary of snakes.

I had another experience with snakes that I never told my parents about. A group of boys were running in a steep area on Catfish Creek during an April 1st picnic. A copperhead made a strike at the boy just in front of me. Its body extended to full length, striking at an elevation of about 30 degrees. The mouth was fully open, and fangs extended. It missed because he was running. Needless to say we changed directions in a big hurry.

Fall Is The Time To Plant

Jean Brewton

I know it is hard for some to believe, but fall is the very best time to plant trees and shrubs. It is difficult to get excited about digging holes to plant these valuable additions to the landscape when the heat indices top three digits, but the following e-mail may get you to think again. I emailed Neil Sperry to ask two questions concerning this topic. Mr. Sperry is a noted horticulture expert in Texas. He is certified, recognized and experienced and as you probably know writes books, articles, columns and an e-gardening newsletter (e-gardens@sperrygardens.com). Suffice to say, he knows what he is talking about.

My questions were meant to establish that fall is the best time to plant trees and shrubs and perhaps, more to the point, when is “fall.” At the time I e-mailed him, we were only a month away from the official start of fall and on that day the temperature outside was 101. So, when is the time to plant? His reply addressed both points well and I had never considered some of the other points he brought up. Here is his response.

Hi, Jean,
I appreciate your inquiry about whether fall planting of landscape stock is really better than at other seasons.

Let me answer it this way: you can plant new trees and shrubs at any season, 12 months a year – but fall plantings have, by far, the better success rates and plants are much easier to maintain.

You often can find sale prices in the fall that don’t exist in the spring, and plants bought in the fall have often been in the same containers since they were repotted in late winter/early spring, so they’re much larger.

Fall-planted trees and shrubs have 6 or 7 months to get new roots established before summer. Trees and shrubs set out in the spring have only one or two.

I try to do all of my major improvement projects in the fall (second half of September, October and November). Always have. Always will.

Hope that helps.

Neil

Well, it did help me. I now have a serious authority to back me up when gardeners disagree with me about fall gardening and I learned some neat buying tips. Also, notice that we must focus on helping our transplants get through the next summer more than surviving the upcoming winter. I hope this helps you create a better (and, maybe, less expensive) landscape. Oh yeah, I was sure happy that I don’t have to plant when my sweat would water the plant as much as the water hose does.

The Peony

Terrica Allee

I moved to East Texas from Southern California in 1994 and was quite amazed by the abundant plant life. As beautiful as Southern California was, I saw the same plants every day and I



took them for granted. There was nothing different, nothing that caught my eye. Upon settling down in Canton, I came to appreciate all of the wonderful gardens and the variety of flowers. It was my hope and dream to have the same variety of beautiful plants thriving in my yard as I had seen in my neighbors’ yards.

Chrysanthemums

Sally Keenan

The first plant that had ever made an impression on me was the peony. It was growing along a shady area on the south side of a friend's house. This flower was absolutely gorgeous and the fragrance was amazing. I asked what it was and my friend didn't really know. She had gotten it as a cutting. At that time, I knew nothing about this beautiful plant, except that I wanted to grow one.

Upon further research I determined that it was a peony, a showy perennial that is among the longest-lived of perennial plants. I also discovered that it is the state flower of Indiana. According to Greek mythology it was named after Paeon, a physician to the gods, who obtained the plant on Mount Olympus from the mother of Apollo. It is also considered a flower of riches and honor. It is used symbolically in Chinese art and is a traditional floral symbol of Mongolia. In 1903, the Qing Dynasty declared the Peony as the national flower.

Wow, with so much history, why aren't these beauties adorning gardens on every street? That is when I began my quest. I asked around, and to my disappointment I was told by countless nurseries that peonies were not actually supposed to grow in East Texas. I argued with nurseries from Dallas to Houston. I had seen this plant thrive and it would grow in East Texas. I was told "good luck," but I would never find one South of Iowa. I was disappointed to say the least, but I never gave up. Then one day last fall, about 15 years later, I was perusing a local nursery, and low and behold, there it was! I was so excited. I purchased five of the actual plants as well as a few of the roots. I was determined to make this plant thrive. The label stated that peonies are hardy from USDA Zones 2 through 7 or 8. Peonies do best in more than a half-day of sunlight or full sun and will go dormant in the fall. Plant peonies in early fall. It's important not to plant them too deep. Peonies prefer a slightly acid soil (pH 5.5 to 6.5).

To this day, my peonies are growing. I have moved them twice much to their unhappiness. Once planted, the peony likes to be left alone and punishes those who try to move it by not flowering again for several years. Although mine haven't flowered, I anxiously await their bloom. All in all, the peony requires very little care. Keep in mind, the peonies you plant today may easily be enjoyed by your grandchildren.

"No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden."

Thomas Jefferson

The days are getting shorter. Summer blooming flowers are dying back. Now is the time of year when chrysanthemums delight and dazzle us with their show of fall color ranging from gold and bronze hues to burgundy, pink or even white. Their beautiful heads complement nature's fall display as trees change colors, and the final crops are prepared for harvest.

The chrysanthemum was cultivated as early as the 15th century BC in China. Pottery dated to be from these early Chinese is often decorated with the image of the flowers.

At that time chrysanthemum, called "chu", was valued not only for its appearance but as an important medicinal herb. Roots, petals and leaves were used in remedies or as food sources.



Mums came to the western world in the 17th century. The botanist, Karl Linnaeus gave us the name chrysanthemum coined from two Greek words chrysos, meaning gold, and anthemom, meaning flower. This was probably an accurate description of the daisy like yellow flower that was known in Europe at that time.

Chrysanthemums belong to the daisy family or Compositae. Modern varieties include a wide range of blossom types. All mums have two types of florets. The ray florets are those that would be called petals on a daisy, and disc florets that form the central part of the daisy. The disc florets are the reproducing parts of the chrysanthemum. Although all mums have both types of florets in some varieties the disc florets are not obvious.

Long nights trigger blooming in the chrysanthemum. In the summer when days are long and nights are short the plants grow vegetatively. Then as fall approaches and the season begins to shift buds begin to appear. Mums will then bloom from August through December.

In Texas garden mums are most readily available in the late summer and into the fall. It is best to purchase plants

with mostly closed buds and good healthy foliage. These will be most attractive planted in beds or pots for fall color. Those plants already in full bloom will not last as long.

Although many gardeners use mums as annuals they can be nurtured to provide blooms for many years. Chrysanthemums like to be placed in sunny well-drained beds. They need at least 6 hours of sun each day for best growth. After they have finished blooming in the fall mulch well for winter protection. Next spring about February or March new shoots will begin to develop around the old stalks. That is the time to dig up each clump and divide it into several sections for replanting. It is best to remove the brown woody central section before replanting.

During the growing season mums do not require a lot of care. They do have a shallow root system so they need regular watering. They don't like to have wet feet though. Fertilize with a good general purpose plant food when feeding other flowering plants. To encourage good bushy plants with lots of blooms it is best to pinch back chrysanthemums several times during the spring and early summer months. They will then reward you with their fall dazzle year after year.

Basil

Dawnvoynn Callahan

Among herbs basil is considered to be "queen of the garden." This native of India is almost everyone's favorite among the culinary herbs. The Greek name for basil, "ocium," is translated "to smell," and it does with a uniquely complex blend of scents and flavors.

Although there are at least 150 known varieties of basil worldwide, only about 15 are available from seed companies. Even fewer varieties are available as transplants. The most popular varieties are the bushy sweet basil with large, wide, crinkly leaves. These bushes can grow quite large. My unattended woody bush has become nearly three feet tall this year. The secret to a long and abundant harvest is to frequently harvest leaves and clip all flower heads. The bush will benefit by maintaining a compact tidy form. The adventurous gardener or cook might try some of the more exotic varieties, lemon, Thai, or cinnamon.

Planted in a sunny location basil can be grown easily by seeding it directly into well-prepared warm soil. Do not plant the seed deeply. I usually rough the soil up a bit, sprinkle the seed in and stomp on it. Then I put a very light sprinkling of sandy soil on top and walk over the area again. This ensures that seed has made good soil contact and won't easily be washed out by the next rainfall.

If you choose to get a head start with transplants treat young basil plants like a tomato. Set the plant low in the soil (at least 2-3 inches deep, even more if the plant is leggy.) Roots will form along the stem. Harvest can begin as soon as new growth begins. You can also take cuttings from your plants at any time and root them in water to make new starts.

Basil is easy to grow as it loves our East Texas climate. A true heat lover it has one drawback. It cannot tolerate cold weather at all. Even the lightest of frosts will send basil "home to the fathers." It is possible to enjoy the flavor of basil in the winter by preserving the leaves in pesto. Frozen pesto can be popped into many dishes for a fresh summertime flavor that will inspire you to grow basil again next year.

Basic Basil Pesto

Dawnvoynn Callahan

5-6 large garlic cloves, peeled
¼ c. pine nuts or pecans
3-3 ½ c. packed fresh basil leaves
salt to taste
½ to ¾ c. good quality extra virgin olive oil

If the pesto is going to be used immediately you may add 3 T. of shredded Parmesan or Romano cheese before adding the olive oil.

A food processor is the best tool for making pesto. Several quick pulses after each the addition of each ingredient will result in a fine thick paste that can be spooned into ice cube trays to be frozen into portioned sizes. The frozen cubes can then be transferred to freezer bags to maintain freshness of taste and color.

"It is a golden maxim to cultivate the garden for the nose, and the eyes will take care of themselves." -**Robert Louis Stevenson**

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Henderson County
Master Gardener Association

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The Henderson County Master Gardener Association is sponsored by the Henderson County office of Texas AgriLife 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.

<http://henderson-co-tx-mg.org/>

