

Denton County Master Gardener Association

# THE ROOT

Grow With Us



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## WHAT'S GROWING ON

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# Buds From The Board

BY CHERYL HUCKABEE, PRESIDENT

*The bluebonnet is to Texas what the shamrock is to Ireland, the cherry blossom to Japan, the lily to France, the rose to England, and the tulip to Holland. ~ Historian Jack Maguire*

I have two favorite months – October and May. They both hit the sweet spot – not too hot and not too cold. This year, we're all so ready to enjoy autumn. We can finally put away our shorts and tees and bring out the cozy sweaters and jackets. Gardening in October is delightful. We can go outside without the fear of heatstroke! Here are a few things on my gardening to-do list this month:

- Plant wildflower seeds, including Texas bluebonnets. I sow wildflower seeds to fill the areas I'd rather not mow with colorful springtime blooms and to give the pollinators an early spring food source. Learn more from our Gardening Basics fact sheet, [Growing Wildflowers from Seed](#) ([dcmga.com](#)).
- Gather seeds from my favorite open-pollinated blooming annuals -- zinnias, sunflowers, cosmos, marigolds, and California poppies. [How to Save Flower Seeds for Next Year](#) ([almanac.org](#)) is a terrific guide for beginning seed savers.
- Replace the perennial plants that succumbed to this summer's heat. October is the best month to plant perennials in Texas. The soil is still warm, and the plants will have time to develop their roots and get established before the heat arrives next summer. Check out the [Texas Superstar® Plants online brochure](#) for a list of perennial plants tested and selected by Texas AgriLife Research for superior performance.
- Apply pre-emergence to my lawn. October is the last chance for getting this important task done to avoid weeds in the spring. [Apply fall preemergence herbicide to avoid spring weeds](#) ([AgriLife Today](#)), which will guide you through the process.
- Give my garden tools some TLC. I'll clean and sanitize, oil, remove rust, and sharpen pruner and mower blades. Our Gardening Basics fact sheet, [Caring for Gardening Tools](#) ([dcmga.com](#)), outlines six basic steps to care for your tools.
- Insulate my plants' roots from the cold and wind and conserve soil moisture by mulching the garden beds. Learn the advantages of organic mulch from [All About Mulch](#) ([dcmga.com](#)) and using an often overlooked resource, [Leaves for Mulch and Compost](#) ([dcmga.com](#)).
- And the most fun of all, I'll peruse the bulb catalogs and order fall bulbs that bloom in the spring. [For Brilliant Spring Color, Plant Your Bulbs Now](#) ([fwbg.org/newsletter](#)) will guide you through the best choices for North Texas, when and how to plant for beautiful spring color.



## Buds From The Board (Cont.)

If you joined us for the Fall Into Gardening Event, we hope you had as much fun as we did. There are even more opportunities to learn in October at our Speakers Bureau presentations throughout the month. Check them out on our website [Event Calendar](#).

Maybe you're considering becoming a Master Gardener. [Becoming a Texas Master Gardener for Denton County](#) explains the program's requirements, cost, general class information, and application process. Please join us on October 13 for the [2024 Intern Class Information Round-Up](#).

So, get outside this month and make October one of your favorite months, too!



### Denton County Master Gardener YouTube Channel

Click on "Videos" and check out our new presentations!  
And don't forget to subscribe!

<http://www.youtube.com/c/DentonCountyMasterGardener>





## Community Strong Farm *Opportunities are Everywhere, You Just Have to Look and Ask!*

BY RUSS ALLEN

Early in 2023, our president Cheryl Huckabee called a few DCMGA members and asked if we would participate in an “Outreach Committee.” As set out in our first meeting, the goal was to find those areas and people within Denton County that DCMGA was not effectively serving. The “Underserved!” Boy, it didn’t take long to come up with a few geographical areas of Denton County and several people groups that were underserved by DCMGA.

We divided up these newly defined areas of need and out we went. Within a very short time, our paths were crossing one another. When you go out to your community with a target and purpose in mind, people respond. UNT’s Native Meadow project was the first to come in! Then a Non-Profit Food Bank was brought to our attention from a number of different sources, and we connected the dots!

It seems this Food Bank was more than a Food Bank! “First Refuge of Denton” has facilities in Denton and Sanger. They provide Medical, Dental, and Counseling Services to the lowest-income people, in addition to their small Food Bank. Yes, they take advantage of all the normal local, state, and federal social services grants to provide dry and canned foods, infant and personal care items, and some fresh fruits and veggies....

But the fresh fruit and veggie grants and funds were drying up! So, two years ago a donor provided them with 14 acres that laid halfway between Denton and Sanger to grow veggies! 14 ACRES! They jumped on this offer with all four feet! They had a well dug, metal building erected, and bought the walls for two walk-in cold storage rooms. They put road rock from the gate to the building and parking area.



Community Strong Farm Volunteers

## Community Strong Farm (Cont.)

Photos Courtesy DCMGA Member Russ Allen



In 2022 they called everyone they knew to “Plant a Garden” called: COMMUNITY STRONG FARM! Young and old came to the call: they laid PVC pipe from the well to the 1st garden area, tilled 0.18 of an acre, built up the rows, laid weed cloth between the rows and covered it with wood chip mulch, and laid drip irrigation down the rows. I do not know what that first year produced, but even with a change in management, the Farm got planted for the spring of 2023.

This is when DCMGA met COMMUNITY STRONG FARM! In June of 2023, we were introduced to the Denton facility, walked through the building, shown the medical and counseling rooms, staff, and their Food Bank storage area. So, I asked, “Where’s the Farm?” Answer: “Oh, you want to see the Farm? We can show you that if you’re interested.” Me: “Ah... Yes, that is why I’m here. Can we go now?” That is all it took, just to ASK and we were off to the races.....

From January 1 to September 1, 2023, they had produced over 2,500# of their own veggies and fed some 3900 families. Now, they are still getting some fresh fruits and vegetables via grants... But Community Strong Farm is their Future!

They have a wonderful group of volunteers. During the first half of this harvest year, there were four wonderful ladies doing most of the harvest, four days a week. They divided it up to one lady per day. Can you imagine in this summer’s heat working out there by yourself? It burnt these ladies out. They were just harvesting and not doing any maintenance or plant care. Home gardeners they were, and hard-working, but as we all know, there is so much more to know and do to keep a full veggie garden going! It’s not just pretty flowers!

So, in our first walk-through, the conversation started with why their squash was dying, what those squishy little grey bugs were, and what the other long-beaked bugs were, why the tomato plants need to be tied up higher rather than laying on the ground, the crop rotation (fruit, root,

## Community Strong Farm (Cont.)

bean, green), why the end of the rows was getting all the water, etc., etc. Wonderful, well-intended people who were ready for our help!

One of the first things I told my Production Manager contact when he looked so down was: “Don’t feel bad. The first thing we learn as Master Gardeners is that we “Kill Plants” and the second is that we only thought we knew how and what we were growing!” Our relationship with CSF has blossomed into a full-fledged family!

In June we inherited: Summer Squash, Squash bugs and Vine Bores, Yellow Crooknecks, Zucchini, Okra and its aphids and ants, Peppers, Cherry Tomatoes, Table Tomatoes, and Cucumbers. Our north Denton county DCMGA members came to the rescue: Brad Allison, Denise Babb, Lisa Marlow, Karen Belk, Martha Cantrell, Barney Sanborn, Donna Hull, and Brenda Martin have all taken at least one to two days a week, 7:am-10:am to make this happen. We have fought pests, rabbits, grasshoppers, and the 2023 Heat! Oh, did I mention we are in the middle of a hay field? Lots of Grasshoppers!

In September, we pulled all the squashes and cucumbers and planted Bush Beans, Carrots, Beets, Radishes, Kale, etc. We have heavily pruned the tomatoes in the hopes of a Fall Harvest and we are still harvesting Okra! In addition, we have even planted Zinnias and Marigolds in the hopes of drawing more pollinators! Maybe, just maybe, these flowers (after they have drawn in the pollinators), can be cut for an added item in the food baskets that are given out or even to brighten the day of the Food Bank Volunteers!

This winter season we hope to harvest as long as we can. CSF would like to open up another acre this coming spring, so get ready to help prep the soils, plant, and harvest for the Community! Community Strong Farm is an Opportunity for DCMGA to serve an underserved geographical area as well as our community’s social needs. “Two birds with one day’s volunteering!”

The future of DCMGA in the north of the county (only a twelve-minute drive from the AgriLife Building) looks awesome. Come get involved in growing and teaching. We hope, through Community Strong Farm, we will also be able to reach out to the local 4H, Sanger FFA, Home School Groups, and other Community groups and individuals.





## Meet A Few 2023 Master Gardener Interns

*We're looking forward to welcoming the Denton County Master Gardener Association's Class of 2024. Last year, forty-four interns inspired us all by their dedication to the community. Thus far, all of them have completed 70+ hours of training and have logged over 5400 volunteer service hours to our mission of educating the community about research-based sustainable gardening.*

*We asked the 2023 interns about their experiences this year. Here's what a few of them had to say.*

### **Donna Hesters**

I will never forget the phone call from KimWootton that I was accepted into the Master Gardener program! I started jumping up and down talking to her. Later in the week, I got a call from my mentor, Melissa Migis, and she started answering my questions from day one.

The day I got my textbook I could not stop reading it because it is so beautiful. (I should have mentioned that I am a retired teacher). The curriculum walks you through each chapter and the speakers were top notch. It took me a bit to catch on to the testing, but I got it!

The 70 hours of volunteering was easy. I was concerned about getting the 70 volunteer hours, but Trish Percy makes it all possible in "Plan Your Week." My advice to next year's interns is the same advice I got, which is to get your volunteer hours done as early as possible. As you know, Texas summers are brutal. Class time and volunteering time provides an excellent opportunity to meet gardeners. The best part of the program has been the friends along the way. I like to think that I have found my tribe! I am still learning, and there are so many ways to get plugged in.

### **Vanessa Fitzgerald**

I credit my grandmother for my love of gardening. She and my grandfather had an acre-sized garden in rural Kentucky. Summer visits to her house were full of tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, and sweet corn. Eventually, I had my first garden in Virginia: a little 4x8 plot. I over-planted and had cucumber vines growing up my deck steps making them nearly unpassable! I started my garden anew when we moved to Washington State. It began small and I soon learned that those cute deer hanging around loved eating my garden goodies, so we built a fence. Raised beds came next and then we gradually expanded the garden over the years. We spent our summers watching everything grow. My kids were big helpers- at first with planting and then as they got older, they lent their muscles to help with the hardscaping. Fruit, vegetables, and flowers filled both the garden and our home. The summer we moved away, my roses were at their best and the air smelled like perfume.



**Donna Hesters ('23), Melissa Migis ('20), Gina Kemna ('23), and Dan Conrad ('23)**

## Meet Master Gardener Interns (Cont.)

As we settled into our new home in the great State of Texas, I realized that there were many things about gardening that I never learned. And what I did know didn't really apply to my new surroundings. Trial and error can be great ways to learn but I wanted to know the science behind why things worked or failed. Weather, pests, and soil here are all different from what I was used to – I wanted to do a deep dive into Texas gardening and learn fast if I was going to be successful here. I immediately started looking for the best resources available to me and that's when I discovered the DCMGA program. I applied, hoped for the best, and was elated to be accepted into the program.

My Master Gardener internship has been a wonderful experience and I am thoughtfully working around our yard applying the concepts I learned in the program. I am so excited about the native and adapted plants that I can incorporate into our landscape plan. Having not one but two growing seasons is a treat. My biggest success this summer was growing basil – I have our freezer stocked with homemade pesto to get us through the winter!



**Vanessa Fitzgerald ('23)**

Sharing what I know and helping my friends and neighbors with their gardening questions has been really gratifying. Volunteering around Denton County as a MasterGardener intern has been a great way to get to know people while also serving my community. My favorite thing about the program is that the learning opportunities are wide and vast.

### **Jeff Hardgrave**

As I travel this journey we call life, I am increasingly thankful and grateful for each one of my experiences. There is a distinct difference between these two words; thankful is a “feeling,” while grateful is an “action.” For me, these must go together! Let's say I have a flat tire and my new friend Mario helps me change it. Being grateful is letting Mario know how much I value and appreciate his help. Yet being thankful is knowing that the tire has been replaced. We are the sum of our experiences, and to be sure, my mother remains the most influential individual in my life. Having now lived over 40% of my life without her, she is ever-present in all that I do. Her example, in aligning deed and word, gave me great gifts; the love of exploration, learning, and sacrifice.

In reflection, my experiences are vast and diverse. My childhood was marked by illness and ultimately surgery, to correct a congenital birth defect at age 7. At the age of 9, I had a robust lawn-mowing business. At age 11, I had a weekend job that came with a real paycheck every week! That resulted in the savings to buy my first woodworking tools and that first car (a '63



## Meet Master Gardener Interns (Cont.)

Chevy Impala) when I got the pivotal driver's license on my 16th birthday! That car provided independent transportation to my next job! Just 19 months later, I got my private pilot's license from the Federal Aviation Administration. My only formal job application led to a 44-year career in the energy industry, working for two Fortune 500 companies, and becoming a board-elected officer. I have tried to embrace all the highs and lows that life offers – college, love, marriages (oh yes, more than one – if you enjoy something, do more of it), children, and family. And there have been moments of loss and adversity – with all my immediate family taken before my 40th birthday. There was a lengthy, challenging bout of severe depression near the mid-1990s that taught me grace, compassion, and patience. Mistakes? They are beyond my ability to count but remain the seasoning God added to His recipe called “me.”

This adventure now continues with DCMGA! As Aristotle observed, “In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous.” I have long appreciated the wonder, beauty, and hope that gardening offers. In my waning years toward retirement, I knew that this gardening “itch” needed to be “scratched!” Certainly, there have been previous juvenile efforts and endeavors, interrupted by ignorance and bermudagrass. The Master Gardener program has long been an aspiration. The intern experience has been fertile and fulfilling. The unanticipated joy beyond seeing your seeds sprout is the flowering of new, perennial friends! Who knew? There may be only one regret – I should have started sooner! But again, that is why we have spring (also known as grace) – a new chance to start again! I am blessed beyond belief!



**Jeff Hardgrave ('23)**



***Resources & Education Opportunities***  
*for Master Gardeners and the Community we serve*  
*can be found on the Calendar at*  
*Upcoming Events.*

*For non-DCMGA events, Continuing Education Opportunities.*

# Plant of the Month - Chrysanthemums

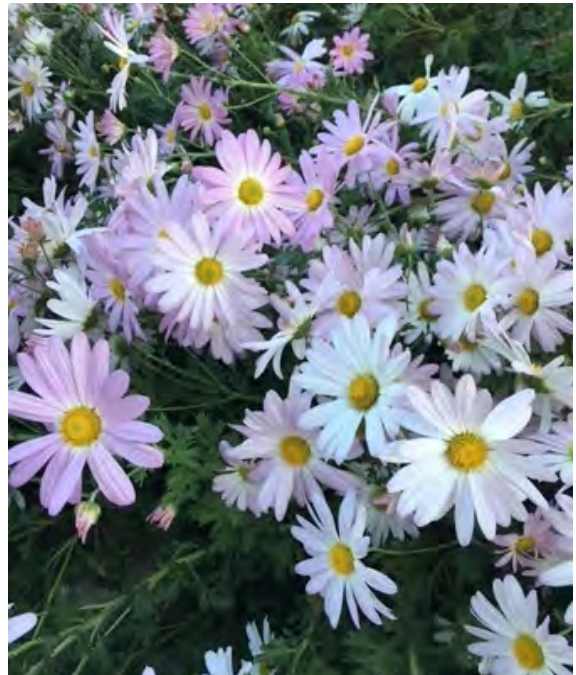
BY JERRY & GLORIA ALEXANDER

Chrysanthemums, or “mums” as many call them, are flowering plants of the genus *Chrysanthemum* in the family of *Asteraceae*. They are native to East Asia and North Eastern Europe. Most species originate from East Asia and the center of diversity is in China. There are countless horticultural varieties and cultivars.

The genus *Chrysanthemum* are perennial herbaceous flowering plants, sometimes subshrubs. The leaves are alternate, divided into leaflets and may be pinnatisect, having lobes that are not discreet, remaining connected to each other.

The compound inflorescence is an array of several flower heads or sometimes a solitary head. The head has a base covered in layers of phyllaries, also known as involucre bract which is a single bract of the involucre of a composite flower. Phyllaries are reduced leaf-like structures that form one or more whorls immediately below a flower head.

Mums are hardy perennials that are best planted in the early spring. They can be started indoors from seeds six to eight weeks before the last spring frost date. Since they can be container-grown, you may want to leave some in pots to use on your porch or patio. When you are ready to plant your mums outside, set the plants 18 to 36 inches apart, depending on their size at maturity. Mums need good air circulation. Plant them in the ground at the same depth that it was grown in the pot. Otherwise, water can sit around the base of the plant and rot the stems when planted too low. You want to keep them evenly moist, but not wet. Be sure to spread mulch around the base to hold moisture and keep weeds away.



Photos Courtesy DCMGA Member Sharrie Ely

## Some *Chrysanthemum* Facts

- The genus *Chrysanthemum* was first formally described by Linnaeus in 1753 with 14 species and hence, bears his name (L) as the botanical authority.
- As of February 2020, there are more than 40 species.
- Chrysanthemums normally start blooming in early autumn. It is also known as the favorite flower for the month of November.
- In addition to basic yellow, you can find them in other colors such as white, purple, and red.

## Mums (Cont.)

### *More Chrysanthemum facts*

- Yellow or white mum flowers are boiled to make Chrysanthemum Tea in some parts of East Asia. But this writer is NOT encouraging anyone to try this. You are on your own.
- Chrysanthemum plants have been shown to reduce indoor air pollution (NASA Clean Air study).



Lastly, mums are beautiful, hardy plants for our area. We personally cut ours back in the early spring, after the danger of the last frost, and they will bloom in mid to late June, depending on the temperature. Early spring is also a good time to divide mums that have been in place for two years or longer. Using a serrated knife, cut the plant in half and then remove one section. Cut this half into sections and replant in other parts of your gardens or share with friends and neighbors. Every garden should have mums for spring and fall color. You will not regret trying several colors to brighten your landscape.

### Resource

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrysanthemum>

SEPTEMBER TURF TIP

## TIME TO APPLY PRE-EMERGENT TO YOUR NORTH TEXAS LAWN

**MID-SEPTEMBER THROUGH EARLY OCTOBER**

THERE'S A SPECIFIC TIME-FRAME TO APPLY

Apply Fall pre-emergents when soil temperatures drop to around 70F for 4-5 consecutive nights or when nighttime lows are 60-65F. This will vary a lot from year to year and region to region. For North TX, this is typically between mid-September to early October. Your time is limited!

**STOP THE GROWTH OF COOL WEATHER WEEDS**

ONCE THE COLD WEATHER USHERS IN WITH  
RAIN AND A COLD FRONT - IT'S TOO LATE

A pre-emergent application will inhibit the seeds before they can "emerge" or germinate in the cooler weather.

**REMEMBER, NOW IS THE TIME**

DON'T MISS THIS BRIEF WINDOW FOR TREATMENT

If you miss this deadline, then the cool-season annual seeds will germinate and it will be another year before you can treat them.

**WHAT TO APPLY**

CORN GLUTEN MEAL OR BENEFIN?

Corn Gluten Meal can have a success of up to 60% if it does not receive rain for five to seven days after it is applied. Benefin will only be effective if applied in the short time frame from mid-September to October. To read more about these options, visit: <https://aggieturf.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Preemergence-Herbicide-Guide-4.pdf>

**CHECK OUT MORE INFORMATION**

ANOTHER RESOURCE FROM TEXAS A&M

To learn more about weed identification and treatment for cool and warm season weeds, be sure to visit

[http://publications.tamu.edu/TURF\\_LANDSCAPE/PUB\\_turf\\_Herbicides%20for%20Weed%20Control%20in%20Turfgrass.pdf](http://publications.tamu.edu/TURF_LANDSCAPE/PUB_turf_Herbicides%20for%20Weed%20Control%20in%20Turfgrass.pdf)

Denton County Master Gardener Association

Questions? Contact our Help Desk

email: [master.gardener@dentoncounty.com](mailto:master.gardener@dentoncounty.com)

PHONE: 940.349.2892





# *You're Invited*

October 2023, Monthly Meeting & Program  
"Roses in Texas"



Don & Pat Edwards, Denton County Master Gardeners, will present  
how to grow and care for beautiful roses in North Texas.

October 11, 2023, 10 am  
Global Spheres Center  
7801 S Interstate 35E, Corinth, TX 76210

## DCMGA Members & Interns

*Plan Your Week (PYW)* has the most current VS/CE Opportunities  
and is sent via VMS every Friday.

# Making the Most Out of Your Chile Pepper Harvest

BY DONNA HULL

## *The Power of Pepper*

There are few vegetables easier and more rewarding to grow in North Texas than peppers. Tropical in origin, our warm climate suits them well, and they thrive in our long growing season, from first warmth of summer to first frost. Biologists have identified at least 25 species of chile peppers, most of which have genetic links to one of the oldest known peppers, chiltepín, which also happens to be the “Texas state native pepper” (jalapeños are the “state pepper”). Most of us fill our gardens with varieties of the species *Capsicum annuum* – bell peppers, sweet peppers, jalapeños, and poblanos – or one of the other four domesticated species. They offer culinary rewards, are used for dyes, organic pesticides, animal deterrents and decorations. They are low in calories and high in fiber, provide Vitamins C, A, K, and several B vitamins. Orange and yellow peppers have lutein and zeaxanthin for our eyes. And while that inflammatory chemical capsaicin may not be everyone’s favorite, in the right dosage and frequency, capsaicin actually promotes pain relief (check out those analgesic creams in your medicine cabinet!). Peppers are good for us!

## *What’s In a Name?*

Chile peppers have been consumed by humans since at least 7500 BC. Fragments of different types of chile peppers have been discovered in 2,000-year-old Peruvian ruins. But why are they called “peppers”? In most literary sources, the credit goes to Christopher Columbus. On his voyages to the West Indies, he and his crew encountered native people cultivating and cooking with hot peppers. Columbus also enjoyed the spicy fruit and compared its heat to the burn that was experienced from black pepper. Hence, the name “pepper.” Columbus (or his doctor Diego Chanca) brought peppers to Europe in 1493-1494, where they quickly spread throughout Europe and Asia.



Red & Green Sweet Peppers



## Chile Pepper Harvest (Cont.)

Horticulturally, its full name is “chile pepper,” which includes ALL peppers, not just the hot ones. But is it chili, chilli, or chile?! According to pepper researcher Danise Coon from New Mexico State University, “chile” is the correct horticultural term for anything produced by the flower of a Capsicum plant. Chili, then, should be reserved for culinary dishes with meat and beans. But in reality, a scan of the literature finds that “chile” and “chili” are often used interchangeably, even in seed catalogs! And “chilli”? It is the British spelling of “chili.”



**Capsaicin-free sweet and bell peppers**

Photos Courtesy DCMGA Intern Donna Hull



**Cayenne peppers are easily dried and ground for long-term shelf life**

### *Some Like it HOT!*

The most common question I am asked when giving away peppers is: “Is it hot?!” The “heat” in a chile pepper comes primarily from a group of chemicals called capsaicinoids. The chemical capsaicin accounts for 80% of capsaicinoids found in chile peppers. With the exception of the bell and sweet peppers, nearly all varieties of *Capsicum annum* produce some level of capsaicin. Just how much depends on the variety.

Capsaicin is produced in glands in the placenta, also called the pith, in the interior of the pepper, beginning about 2-3 weeks after the fruit starts developing. Many people believe that the seeds are a major source of heat in the fruit, but the seeds are not the source – just the messengers! Seeds form in abundance along the sides of the placenta, and as they grow, they absorb some of the capsaicin-rich oils. Superhots, peppers high on the Scoville Scale, have capsaicin glands not only in the placenta, but in the walls of the fruit. They also make additional chemicals called resiniferoids, which add even more heat to the pepper. It is believed that these irritating chemicals evolved in peppers to discourage mammals from eating the fruit, giving the advantage to birds – who eat the fruit (but do not sense capsaicin) and can disperse the seeds over longer distances. Capsaicin also slows the growth of fungal organisms, promoting better seed germination.

Whether or not you care for the spice may not be due to a lack of “conditioning” or growing up with spicy chile peppers. All of us have sensory organs called TRPVI



## Chile Pepper Harvest (Cont.)

receptors that are activated by the presence of capsaicin and result in that painful, burning sensation in our mouths and elsewhere. Some people have a very high number of TRPV1 receptors and are naturally more sensitive to the burn of capsaicin. Others may have fewer and are less susceptible. Those who are able to tolerate capsaicin are also likely able to distinguish more flavors among chile peppers. It is said that repeatedly ingesting high-heat chile peppers will produce endorphins that mask any pain that occurs and even induces a mild euphoria. I personally cannot attest to this, but I would love to know if it's true!

### *Harvesting and Storing*

When harvesting peppers, take care: peppers do not have a natural “zone of separation” in the stem of the fruit and are best removed with pruners. Branches break easily, and it's not hard to lose more plant than you planned when trying to “snap off” a pepper by hand.

Green fruit are considered mature when they are firm and make a “popping” sound when squeezed. Bell and sweet peppers can be picked green, or the harvester can wait until they turn red, yellow, orange, or purple (depending on variety). As peppers turn from green to red, the fruit softens and the sugar and vitamin A content increase. Peppers slow their production (and reduce their size) in the high heat of summer. Try to keep your pepper plants alive and healthy through the heat - they will rebound in the fall and produce an abundance of peppers in September and October. The first freeze will end the harvest – so pick the green ones before the temperature plunges below 32°F!

Immediately after harvesting, wash and cool the peppers. According to food scientists, bell peppers are sensitive to cold and should not be stored under 50°–55°F for extended periods. Doing so reduces storage life and results in decay, discoloration, and off-flavors. This is not easy to do in the modern refrigerator, so store your peppers on the door or on the front of a bottom shelf where temperatures tend to be a little warmer. In general, spicy peppers are not as cold sensitive, and can be stored at 45.5°F for 3–5 weeks.

### *Preserving Peppers*

Although most peppers can be preserved in more than one way, it is important to match the preserving method with the type of pepper. Bell peppers, for example, are thicker-walled and can withstand freezing for a limited time. Thinner-walled peppers, typically your hot and spicy peppers, are better preserved by being dried or pickled. When you work with hot chile peppers, remember to wear gloves, do not touch your eyes, and consider whether or not you have enough ventilation. Always follow best practices in your kitchen with regard to food safety. When in doubt, throw it out! And finally - put dates on your preserved chile peppers - nothing lasts forever, and it's important to know when you've kept something too long.

## Chile Pepper Harvest (Cont.)

### Drying

Drying chile peppers is probably the oldest and most consistently used method of preserving peppers around the world. Any pepper can be dried, but smaller, spicy peppers (e.g., cayenne peppers) dry best. Once dried, these peppers can be rehydrated and used in soups and stews, or ground into flakes or powder for long-term use. There are four methods of drying.

1. **Sun Drying:** This method takes time, requires daytime temperatures above 85°F, good airflow, and, most of all, a DRY climate with plenty of sunshine. Bring peppers indoors if temperatures might drop below the dewpoint. Humidity is an issue in North Texas, so this may not be the best method.
2. **Air Drying Indoors:** If you want to try air drying indoors, slit the peppers with a knife, then thread the peppers on a heavy string through the green caps. Hang in dry, warm place for 3-4 weeks. Throw out any peppers that develop mold in the interior.
3. **Oven Drying:** cut peppers into uniform-sized pieces and spread onto baking sheets. Place in the oven at 150°F for 1-2 hours, cracking the door open to allow moisture to escape. Remove pepper pieces as they dry.
4. **Dehydrating:** Follow the instructions provided by the manufacturer of your dehydrator. In general, cut small peppers in half, and larger peppers into smaller, uniform-sized pieces. Drying time is 4-12 hours at 125-135°F. Personal note: dehydrators can produce large amounts of pepper fumes!!! If you are drying hot peppers, consider moving the dehydrator outdoors or into the garage!

After drying, store the peppers in an airtight and moisture-proof container or vacuum-pack and keep in a cool, dry, dark place. Watch for mold development and throw away at the first sign. Dried peppers can also be stored in an airtight container in the freezer.

### Freezing

Peppers can be frozen whole, halved, sliced, diced, roasted, not roasted – you choose! Just remove the stem, pith, and seeds before you place them in an airtight container and into the freezer. Use within a few months, as peppers do lose their flavor. Here are a few helpful tips:

- When freezing fresh peppers, one common question is whether or not peppers need to be blanched before freezing. If you are going to use the peppers within a few months and want a crisp texture, do not blanch. Simply wash the peppers, and remove seeds, stem, and pith. Cut to your preferred size, freeze pieces separately on trays, then pack and store in an airtight package.



**Pepper interior, showing placenta (pith) with the adjacent seeds**

## Chile Pepper Harvest (Cont.)

- For longer shelf life, blanch pepper halves for 3 minutes, smaller pieces for 2 minutes. Cool the peppers, freeze, and place in an airtight package.
- Many people prefer to roast their peppers, especially bell peppers, before freezing. Roasting followed by steaming allows for the removal of the pepper skin from the flesh. It also softens the pepper and enhances the richness of the flavor. Once roasted, peppers can be packed into airtight bags and frozen.
- A Jamie Oliver pro-tip: freeze peppers whole. Whenever you want to add pepper flavor to a recipe (sauce, etc.), remove a pepper from the freezer and grate the amount you want directly into the dish!

### *Pickling*

A favorite way of preserving peppers (and my personal favorite) is to pickle peppers in salt and vinegar (usually with a little sugar and a couple of garlic cloves!). Peppers most commonly preserved by this method are banana peppers and jalapeños. There are numerous recipes on the Internet; pick one with the ingredients you like and try it. Pickled peppers can be kept in the refrigerator for 2-4 months or canned in a boiling water bath canner for longer shelf life. The most common issue you'll encounter is that peppers soften in vinegar solutions over time. There are a few fixes, but the best one is simply to eat the peppers in the first 3-4 months!



**Banana peppers and jalapeños are commonly preserved by pickling**

### *And Finally...*

- Sugar is a great preservative, and many people make spicy and sweet jellies and jams with chile peppers.
- Make your favorite pepper dishes (e.g., stuffed peppers) and freeze! I vacuum-pack and freeze blends of onions and peppers to add to stir fry, omelets, etc. for quick prep.
- Peppers are a low-acid food by nature; they will have to be pressure-canned if they have not been pickled in an acid solution. Only undertake this process with the right equipment and knowledge.
- Peppers can be fermented, but please use caution, the right equipment, and only use a recipe from a source you trust.
- Do not store peppers in oils unless they are being stored in the freezer; at room temperature, it is possible for the organisms that produce botulism toxin to become active in the oil. Use caution!



## Chile Pepper Harvest (Cont.)

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# Want to Become a Master Gardener? Now Recruiting For Our 2024 Intern Class

BY CHERYL HUCKABEE

Do you love gardening?

Are you interested in broadening your knowledge of sustainable gardening?

Do you like making friends and doing things with others who share your interests?

Is serving your community important to you?

You may ask yourself these questions if you're considering becoming a Master Gardener. And, if you answer yes to any of these questions, becoming a Master Gardener is quite likely right for you.

The benefits of volunteer service with the Master Gardener program are multifold. Studies have found Master Gardeners experience a significant improvement in quality of life after becoming part of the program. Interaction with nature improves mental health, reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and reduces muscle tensions. Master Gardeners can socialize regularly with people who share their passion, add to their gardening knowledge, and share their experiences to improve their communities (*Boyer, Waliczek and Zajicek*).

Texas A&M AgriLife sponsors and governs the Texas Master Gardener Program. As one of Texas' two land-grant universities, Texas A&M University has three educational missions:

- Teaching and training degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students at eleven university campuses.
- Research at the TAMU campuses and at dozens of research centers across the state in the areas of climate and the environment, computation and information, education and outreach, energy, food and water, global health and security, healthcare, infrastructure, materials, and manufacturing, society, policy, and the economy.
- Extension through 250 county Extension offices and 900 professional educators. AgriLife Extension offers programs to Texas residents in agriculture and natural resources, community economic development, family and community health, and volunteer programs.

Texas Master Gardener volunteers receive in-depth horticultural training through each county's Master Gardener program. In return, they serve their community through the county Extension office by offering educational programs and projects focused on sustainable gardening (*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension*).

## Want to Become a Master Gardener? Now Recruiting For Our 2024 Intern Class

Denton County Master Gardener interns receive 70 hours of instruction during the intern classes taught by some of the best horticultural educators in Texas. The class subjects include:

- Plant Development & Plant Pathology
- Soil & Soil Nutrition
- Texas Trees & Native Plants
- Edible Gardening
- Rainwater Harvesting & Irrigation
- Earth-Kind® and Fire-Wise Landscaping
- Turfgrass Culture
- Plant Propagation
- Entomology & Integrated Pest Management
- Mycology, Composting & Vermiculture

At its core, the Master Gardener program is a public service program. First-year Interns are required to volunteer a minimum of 70 hours to projects sponsored and supervised by DCMGA. A wide variety of projects are available for volunteer service, including annual events (Plant Sale and Garden Tour), youth and children's programs, community gardens, landscape design, public speaking, community partnership programs, special interest groups, beautification projects, and administrative committees.

Become a member of a highly educated corps of volunteers who have earned the title "Master Gardener" and improve the quality of life for yourself and your community. To learn more about the DCMGA intern program, application process, and informational meetings, visit our website at <https://dcmga.com/>.

The DCMGA Class Planning Team and members look forward to meeting you and sharing why we're so enthusiastic about this wonderful program!

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## Want to Become a Master Gardener? Now Recruiting For Our 2024 Intern Class



Plant Sale



FMFB Community Garden



Garden Tour



Denton County Historical Park



The Grove



Science With Attitude (SWAt)

There are many Master Gardener projects available  
for volunteer service.





# Herbs: The Spice of Life

BY SHERRI URSINI



Herbs are the spice of life. From using them in our cooking to beautifying our gardens, these are the true unsung heroes of our gardens. Naturally, we would want to preserve what we have grown and enjoy it all year, whether fresh or dried.

There are many practices for preserving herbs for long-term storage. My friend makes a beautifully aromatic basil tomato soup – how wonderful that she enjoys a little piece of her garden in the wintertime. Another great way to use your herbs is to make a homemade all-purpose cleaner. Combine rosemary, white vinegar, and lemon peel. Let it sit for two to four weeks. Next, strain it, add equal parts water to the solution, and store it in a spray bottle. Voila! You have your own cleaner!

I hope I have your attention! You see, there are so many ways you can keep your summer garden alive in the winter by using what you have preserved.

***An important note: do not use any plants out of your garden that have been treated with chemicals that would be not safe for human consumption.***



Clemson Cooperative Extension, Home and Garden Information Center offers many ways to grow, maintain, and preserve herbs. The best time to harvest is before the herb has bolted or flowered. I usually grab a basket in the morning before the hot sun stresses the leaves of the herb to wilt. Sage, oregano, basil, and thyme always do well. With the exception of basil, these plants have been continuously growing in my garden for years.

## Herbs: The Spice of Life (Cont.)

Long ago, many would tie their herbs up in bundles and let them air dry. I admit, I still do this. There is a poetic presence in the air with herbs drying in a kitchen just waiting to be used in your next sourdough recipe or dry rub on a roast. Using a dehydrator is helpful in the process, or, if you do not own one, you can use your oven at the lowest temperature for drying. Using a



cookie sheet and cooling rack, you can place your herbs in the oven on the lowest setting and dry until crisp. The **St. Louis Herb Society** mentions herbs should be processed as soon as possible, but if for some reason you are unable to process them right away, the plant matter can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 10 days, wrapped in a paper towel.

Joseph Masabni wrote in “Growing Herbs in Texas” (AgriLife Extension) that when herbs are

thoroughly dry, it is recommended to seal them in an air-tight container such as a canning jar. Keeping your dried herbs in a dark cool place is best to keep the potency of the herb. Make sure there is no moisture in the jar or any sign your herbs are not fully dried, and discard if mold is present.

In “Growing Herbs in Texas,” Masabni mentions many ways our herbs can be used when we process them well, for instance with teas, bread, room fresheners, salad dressings, mint jellies, herb butter, sachets, potpourri, herb pillows, and balms. I have infused many herbs and made them into a balm. These are great for gift-giving. Many sources and books are mentioned in the AgriLife Extension “Growing Herbs in Texas” article.



Organized groups interested in herbs and their culture and uses include:

- [Herb Society of America](#)
- [National Herb Day](#)
- [Herb Association of Texas](#)
- [American Botanical Council](#)
- [United Plant Savers](#)
- [American Herbal Products Association](#)
- [American Herbal Pharmacopoeia](#)



## Herbs: The Spice of Life (Cont.)

As we create all of the aromatic possibilities, I wish you well and enjoy the process. Remember to share the recipe with your friends, whether it is lemon lavender cookies or a wonderful fall tea. Enjoy our bounty together, as it is good for the soul.



Photos Courtesy Canva

### Sources Cited & Links

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*The St. Louis Herb Society*

*"Growing Herbs"*

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*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension*

*"Growing Herbs in Texas," Josph G. Masabni (a download pdf)*

<https://cdn-de.agrilife.org/extension/departments/hort/hort-pu-122/publications/files/growing-herbs-in-texas.pdf>

*The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is implied.*



# Chill Fall Bulbs Now for Spring Color

BY MARTHA CANTRELL

First, they are called 'Fall Bulbs' because they are planted in the fall. They bloom in spring, some in very early spring. Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*), for example, can bloom when snow is on the ground and are sometimes planted in lawns because they are finished blooming long before the turf comes out of dormancy. Fall bulbs can add badly needed color to an otherwise bleak landscape and bring the hope of spring and all its glory.

Second, because of our short, warm winters, our fall bulbs need vernalization before planting. That's a fancy word derived from the Latin root '*vernus*', which means "of spring" or to make spring-like. It simply means we must prechill our fall bulbs before we plant them. The rule of prechilling bulbs is this: More is better than less. You can't over-chill bulbs. Bulbs that don't get sufficient chilling tend to be stunted if they bloom at all. And if they bloom, the flowers open down in the leaves, both leaves and flowers are stunted and short.

The two most popular fall bulbs that need chilling are Tulips and Dutch Hyacinths. I include Crocus in this group as well because it blooms so early in the spring. Better suited to our warmer climates, Daffodils, Grape Hyacinths, and Paperwhites can be planted directly in the ground without chilling.

To prechill your spring-blooming bulbs you will need a minimum of 45-60 days of chill time. You should put them in your refrigerator crisper that does not contain fruit or vegetables, which can give off ethylene gas. Ethylene gas is harmless to people but can harm bulbs. If you have a fridge used for beer and soft drinks and no food (sounds like chillin' to me!), that would be ideal. They need to be stored in the bags they come in, which are specially ventilated to keep the bulbs from drying out.

Photos Courtesy DCMGA Intern Martha Cantrell



**Double Paperwhite**

After chilling, the best time to plant your spring-blooming bulbs is between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Planting them too early will reverse the chilling process. They also need to be planted immediately after being removed from the fridge. If you're like me, with dozens of projects going at once, even in the winter, make sure you don't let your chilled bulbs sit in your garage or on your kitchen counter for even a day, as this will also reverse your chilling process.

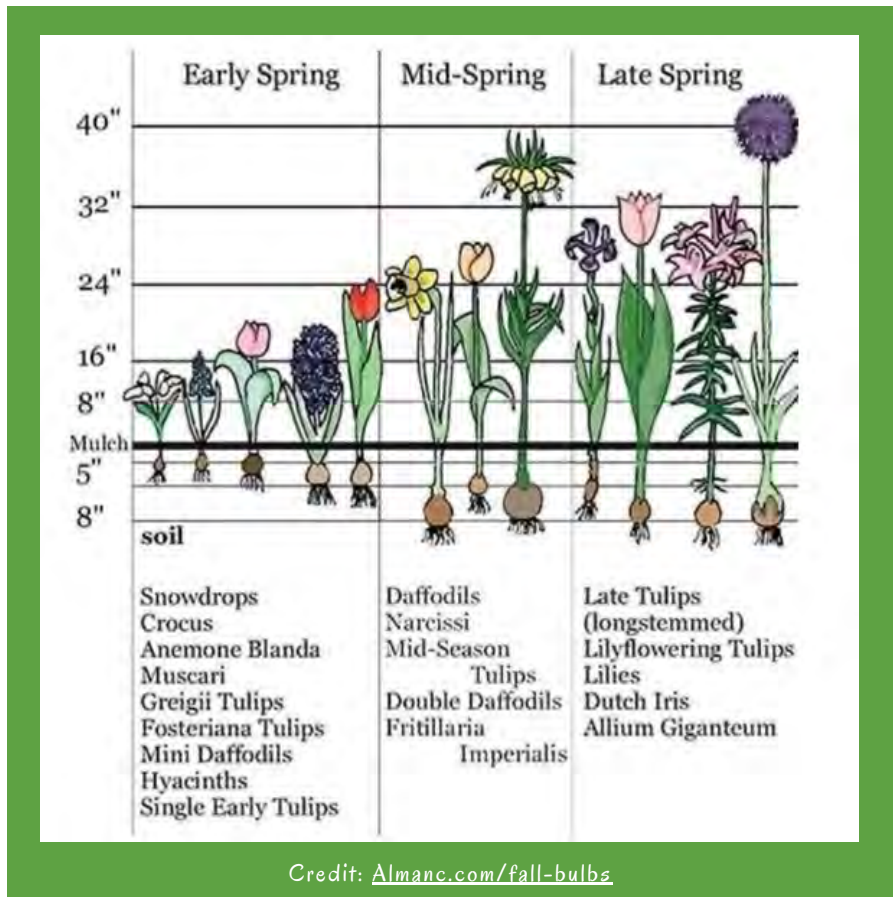
## Chill Fall Bulbs Now for Spring Color (Cont.)

One important thing to remember aboutprechilled bulbs is...unless you are willing to lift, which is a fancy way to say 'dig up', every chilled bulb after the foliage turns yellow and dies back, they should be considered an annual plant. I put out over 300 bulbs per season and would drive myself crazy trying to remember which bulbs are which.

Lastly, here are my favorite fall bulbs that grow VERY well in North Texas. Plant these and you will have gorgeous, early spring color when the rest of the area is grey.

### ***My Top Spring-Blooming Bulbs to Plant in the Fall:***

- Tulips
- Dutch Hyacinth
- Daffodils & Paperwhites
- Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*)



**A fancy daffodil from Martha's garden**





2024 DCMGA membership renewal opens Sep 1  
Veterans and 2023 Interns \$20 until Jan 31, \$30 after  
Scan the QR code or go to the Member Home Page



**Leave the Seeds & Stems for Bird Food & Insect Shelter**

**BY HELP DESK TEAM**

*Q: It has been a rough summer for our landscape plants with the heat and drought. Now birds and butterflies are migrating through our landscape which is parched and dead in some places. Is there anything homeowners can do in their yards to help them?*

A: Thank you for your question and your concern. Yes, there are several things you can do to help ensure safe passage for those migrating through our area. Let's start by looking at a popular and beautiful migratory insect, the monarch butterfly. Monarchs enter the Texas portion of this flyway during the last days of September. By early November, most have passed through into Mexico. You can track the migration of monarchs through our area at: <https://monarchwatch.org/migration/>.

**What do monarchs and other butterflies need during their travels?**

Nancy Collins, a member of the Elm Fork chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists offers many suggestions in her article, "Enticing North Texas Butterflies to Your Yard". In summary, she recommends having nectar-producing plants, a water

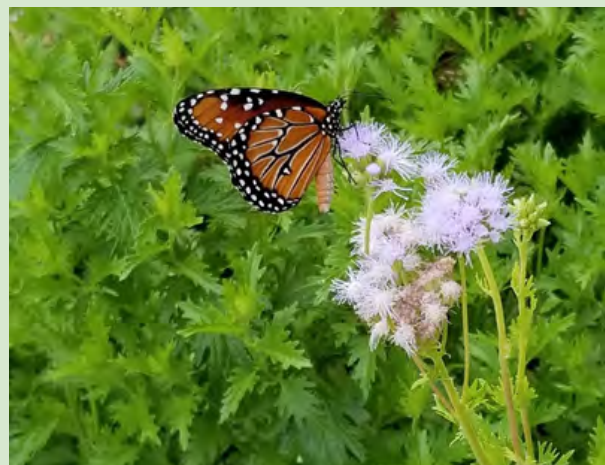
source, and safe places to hide from predators. She tells us that, "There are hundreds of butterfly species (and attractive moths) that visit Texas." The table in the article provides detailed information on pairing favorite nectar sources and larval foods for the most common types of butterflies migrating through North Texas. (<https://txmn.org/elmfork/enticing-north-texas-butterflies/>)

As you make plans for your landscape next year with a focus on helping butterflies, the Xerces Society offers many helpful suggestions: [Monarch Conservation in Gardens, Towns, and Cities](#).

**What about hummingbirds?**

Three hummingbirds common in our area before moving to warmer winters are the ruby-throated, black-chinned, and Anna's. This map provides sightings during hummingbird migration. <https://maps.journeynorth.org/map/?map=hummingbird-adult-male&year=2023>

What do hummingbirds need as they travel? Hummers eat fruit juices, pollen, and insects. You may also add a hummingbird feeder to



supplement their foraging. Hummingbird feeders should have a red top to clue in the little birds that this is a food source. It is best not to select a feeder with big yellow flowers on it though because yellow can be popular with wasps.

You DO NOT need to use red dye or purchase red-dyed liquids from the store, just mix sugar and water and a ratio of 1:4 (sugar to water). "It's recommended that feeder liquid be changed and thoroughly cleaned every other day, but it is important that they are cleaned and refilled at least twice a week in hot weather (summer) and once a week in cooler weather (spring/fall) to prevent the growth of mold." <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/hummingbird-nectar-recipe>

### How to help migrating birds?

For supplemental food in your feeders add black sunflower seeds, millet, peanuts, peanut butter, or suet cakes. They will also enjoy seeds from your dried flower heads if you can leave them in place for a while. Be sure to have water available and clean the water location, such as a bird bath, frequently. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) recommends providing food, water, and shelter for birds. You can help migratory birds by:

- Planting a variety of fruiting and flowering plants that will be available to migrants when they arrive in the spring and depart in the fall.
- Leave as much dead plant material as possible on the land as dead trees and brush piles provide shelter, nest sites, and food (insects) for migrating birds.

For more information and tracking the bird migration through North Texas, check out Birdcast Migration tools: <https://birdcast.info/migration-tools/> and <https://dashboard.birdcast.info/region/US-TX>.

**"Lights out"** Artificial light is scattered across the landscape of the entire country, and birds are frequently attracted to lighting, especially during inclement weather events during migration. Unfortunately, lights can cause confusion, disorientation, and exhaustion - directly impacting their ability to migrate. Texas Parks and Wildlife recommends: Turning off all nonessential lights from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. each night during bird migration. Do not use landscape lighting to illuminate trees or gardens where birds may be resting. For essential lights (security and safety lighting), use the following dark skies-friendly lighting practices:

- Aim lights downward,
- Use lighting shields to direct light downward and avoid light shining into the sky or trees,
- Use motion detectors and sensors so lights only come on when you need them and
- Close blinds at night to reduce the amount of light from windows.

*If you have questions about any horticulture-related subjects,  
please contact our Master Gardener Help Desk at 940.349.2892 or [master.gardener@dentoncounty.gov](mailto:master.gardener@dentoncounty.gov).  
It's free of charge, and our pleasure to assist you.*



# DCMGA

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ***Designing a Pollinator Garden***

**Oct. 5** Adding a pollinator garden to your landscape is a wonderful way to support the insects and birds that enable all things to grow. Let Denton County Master Gardener Mike James help you with design tips to assure your pollinator heaven is also an aesthetic asset in your landscape.  
Lewisville Grand Theater 6-7PM

### ***October 2023, Monthly Meeting & Program "Roses in Texas"***

**Oct. 11** Please join us for our Monthly Meeting & Program, "Roses in Texas." Fran Powell, Dallas County Master Gardener, will present how to grow and care for beautiful roses in North Texas. The monthly business meeting will follow the program.  
Global Spheres, 10-12PM

### ***DCMGA Round Up/Informational Event for Class of 2024***

**Oct. 13** This meeting is to inform prospective Class of 2024 candidates of the requirements to become a Denton County Master Gardener and to familiarize them with the organization.  
Global Spheres, Corinth 10AM-12PM

### ***What's the Buzz about Native Bees?***

**Oct. 17** Learn about the most common native bees in North Texas, why they are so beneficial, what plants attract them, and how to protect their habitat in your garden or landscape. Presented by Kathryn Wells. Free of charge;  
Flower Mound Public Library 6:30-7:30PM

### ***Ask a Master Gardener Round-table***

**Oct. 19** Do you have gardening questions? Denton County Master Gardeners are here to help! Join us for a round-table of several Master Gardeners presented in partnership with Keep Lewisville Beautiful.  
Lewisville Grand Theater 6-7PM

### ***Put Your Landscape to Bed***

**Oct. 19** Co-sponsored by Keep Aubrey Beautiful and the City of Aubrey Let Denton County Master Gardener Mike James share some advice to help get your landscape ready for winter.  
Aubrey Public Library 7-8PM



# AUBREY LIBRARY GARDENING SERIES

Location- Aubrey Area Library  
226 Countryside Dr., Aubrey, TX 76227

**Jumpstart your gardening this Fall with our free  
educational series on the 3rd Thursday  
Brought to you by Denton County Master Gardeners!**

*Fall is the best time to have a  
garden. Find out why and  
how to extend the season  
with fresh veggies!*

**AUGUST 17**  
7-8:00pm  
**Fall Vegetable Gardening**  
*Cheryl Huckabee*

*Learn how to create safe  
spaces for your pups while  
keeping your landscape  
beautiful.*

**SEPTEMBER 21**  
7-8:00pm  
**Dogscaping**  
*Carol Arment*

*Follow these steps for putting  
your yard to sleep for the  
Winter.*

**OCTOBER 19**  
7-8:00pm  
**Put your Landscape to Bed**  
*Mike James*



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating. We seek to provide reasonable accommodation for all persons with disabilities for this program and ask that you notify the Denton County AgriLife Extension Office of the auxiliary aid or service that will be required.





## Denton County Master Gardener Association



### JOIN US TO LEARN MORE

General Meeting & Program  
October 11, 2023, 10 am-noon  
&  
2024 Intern Informational Meeting  
October 13, 2022, 10 am-noon

Both at the Global Spheres Center  
7801 S I-35, Corinth



Scan the QR code or go to  
[dcmga.com/become-a-master-gardener](https://dcmga.com/become-a-master-gardener) for details & to apply

Now Recruiting for Our  
2024 Intern Class

## Want to Be a Master Gardener?

Online Applications  
Available Aug 30 - Oct 20 at  
[dcmga.com](https://dcmga.com)

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating. We seek to provide reasonable accommodation for all persons with disabilities for this program and ask that you notify the Denton County AgriLife Extension Office of the auxiliary aid or service that will be required.





### Mission Statement

Denton County Master Gardener Association educates and engages county residents in the implementation of research-based horticultural and environmental practices that create sustainable gardens, landscapes, and communities.

### Extension EO/EEO Statement

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

### 2023 Board of Directors

President	Cheryl Huckabee
Vice-President - Projects	Kelli Bixler
Secretary	Missy McCormick
Treasurer	Dale Powell
Communications Dir. - Systems	Judy Allen
Education Director	Daniel Arenas
Member-at-Large	Kim Shaneyfelt
Past President	Kathryn Wells

### Social Media

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<https://www.facebook.com/DentonCountyMGA>

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/DentonCountyMGA>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/@DentonCountyMGA>

Pinterest:

<https://www.pinterest.com/DentonCountyMGA>

YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/c/DentonCountyMasterGardener>

### Save the Date

October 11

General Meeting & Program - "Roses in Texas" - Global Spheres, Corinth

October 13

New Member Roundup, Global Spheres, Corinth



### Contact Information

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<https://dcmga.com>

### Content

**The Submission deadline for the November edition of *The Root* is Sunday, October 15.**

Submissions may be revised at the discretion of the editor.

Ideas, photos, and articles are welcome and may be submitted to Editor Karen Gibson or Communications Director Judy Allen at [dcmga.communications@gmail.com](mailto:dcmga.communications@gmail.com).

Unless otherwise attributed, all photos are courtesy of Denton County MGA.