

Denton County Master Gardener Association

THE ROOT

Grow With Us 



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WHAT'S GROWING ON



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<https://dcmga.com>

Buds from the Board

BY RAE LINE NOBLES, PRESIDENT

Happy July to you! We hope you enjoy reading this edition of *The Root*. The editors have gathered great articles for your summer gardening, as well as updates on what's happening at Denton County Master Gardener Association (DCMGA). One announcement for those interested in becoming a Master Gardener: We will be recruiting soon for the 2026 Intern class. Watch our website www.dcmga.com on how to apply. Come grow with us!

On a more serious topic, we all see wildfires increasing across the country, even Minnesota! These fires have cost billions of dollars in residential, agricultural and forest destruction as well as the devastating deaths of humans, livestock, and wildlife. In Texas, we are constantly under summer fire watches as winds, summer drought and heat hit hot and hard. What can we do?

We may not be able to prevent a wildfire, but we can prevent as much damage as possible if one occurs. Firewise Landscaping is an important topic for home and land owners today. It won't create a "fire proof" environment, but it will move you in the right direction for your property to become "fire resistant." It's all about determining where your property ignition zone is, and what's realistically defendable. Of course, collaboration with neighbors on creating Firewise spaces is the best defense against a fire spreading among you and helping each other if it does.

BAND TOGETHER BEFORE WILDFIRE

HELPING COMMUNITIES TAKE MEASURES TO IMPROVE WILDFIRE DAMAGE OUTCOMES

We can't stop natural disasters from occurring. Wildfire, however, is one natural disaster where increased safety to homes and communities can result from taking simple, scientifically proven steps beforehand.

Members of your community can substantially improve fire outcomes by working together to do things like removing downed tree branches, dry leaves, and pine needles. Volunteers can assist neighbors with extra support and participate in coordinated local efforts, like community woodchipper events.

NFPA **FIREWISE USA**
Reduces Reducing Wildfire Risk

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FIREWISE USA® IS A PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION®

Photo courtesy of NFPA.org

Knowing what to plant where, learning about landscape islands and other effective ideas, and taking steps over time to integrate Firewise techniques into existing landscape can be done!

- You can begin with fire resistant plantings such as lantana, turks cap, bluebonnets, asters, columbine, primrose, violets and butterfly bushes.
- Overgrown, dry vegetation close to structures is wildfire kindling, so clean up or remove it.
- Dead vegetation and wood piles are fuel and should never be near structures.
- Keep grass areas cut and taller landscaping away from structures and adequately watered.

Want to learn more? Visit www.firewise.org or Google "Firewise Landscaping in Texas" for resources by Texas A&M Forest Service.



Buds from the Board (Cont).

On to happier events! Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service named its 2024 Search for Excellence statewide awardees May 21 and DCMGA once again was a big winner at the Live Oak level (extra large MGA) in all five categories nominated:

- ★ Outstanding Texas Master Gardener 1st Place: Mr. Russ Allen (Class of 2021)
- ★ Workshop Presentation 1st Place: Earth-Kind Landscape Design
- ★ Teaching Site 1st Place: Roots for Wings Demonstration Garden
- ★ Youth 2nd Place: Solar Eclipse Project w/ Elm Fork MN & Perot Museum of Nature & Science
- ★ Outstanding Master Gardener Assoc. 2nd Place: Denton County Master Gardener Association

We are so proud of our fantastic members and their commitment to sustainable, research-based horticulture and our mission to educate the public. Congratulations to one and all!

Have a safe and fun Fourth of July!

-Raeline

WHAT TO PLANT IN JULY

- Set out the indoor transplants you started that are ready.
- Plant melon and winter squash seeds in the garden for a fall harvest.
- Direct sow carrots, beets and other root crops.
- Direct sow seeds of cucumbers, beans and summer squash for fall harvest.
- Plant broccoli or cauliflower transplants in the garden late this month.
- Always cut back blackberry canes that have bloomed and fruited. Leave all new canes in place for next year's crop.
- Keep your soil mulched to hold in precious moisture and cut down on weeds.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE MONTHLY TIPS](#)



Plant of the Month: For the Love of Lemons

BY MARTHA CANTRELL

Like any good parent, gardeners shouldn't pick favorites. But in recent years I have broken that rule, choosing "Leonard," my Meyer Lemon tree, as my all-time favorite plant. This plant has risen above all my expectations and out-performed industry standards. That's not easy to do here and I'd like to share with you the ups and downs of my journey growing a Meyer Lemon tree in Zone 8. Hopefully you can learn from my mistakes and not your own.

About the Meyer Lemon

Meyer lemons are hybrids of a citron and a mandarin orange. They were first developed in China then introduced to the world in the early 1900s. It differs from the traditional lemon in the following ways:

- The fruit is rounder
- It is sweeter and less acidic
- It has a thinner, edible rind
- It has a short harvest window and is only available in grocery stores during Nov to March
- Meyer lemon trees have a cold tolerance of 35°F compared to 50°F for a traditional lemon



Photo courtesy of DCMGA Member Martha Cantrell

General Growing Guidelines

Here are basic facts to successfully grow Meyer lemons:

- Meyer lemon trees require at least 6 hours of full sun; if possible, place your container or in-ground tree in a location where it can avoid getting the most intense afternoon Texas sun.
- Plant your tree in well-drained, slightly acidic soil.
- Water in-ground trees once/week and container-grown trees 2-3 times/week, allowing the soil to dry out slightly in between waterings.
- Meyer lemon trees do require pruning. The most important guidelines are as follows:
 - Prune when the tree is 3'-4' tall and lemons are ripe (wintertime)
 - Cut branches that do not produce fruit, are dead or diseased, grow straight up (water sprouts) or cross one another.
- You may thin the fruit when they are pea-sized if necessary.
- Apply a balanced fertilizer during the growing season (spring to fall).
- Rotate the container 1/4 turn every week for even sun exposure.
- Move the tree under cover during hail or strong windstorms.



Meyer Lemons (Cont.)

Overwintering

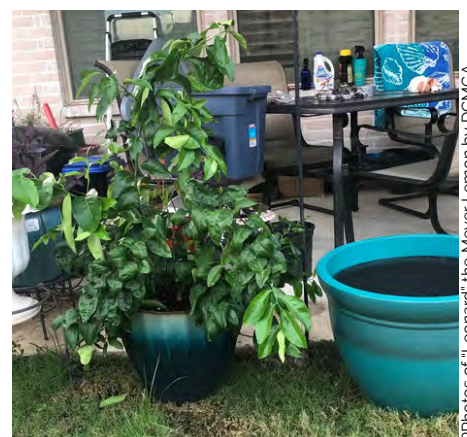
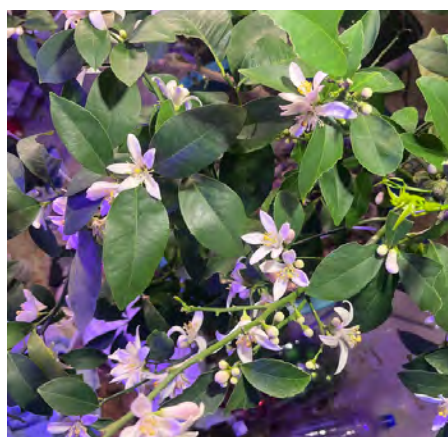
Meyer lemon trees cannot be left outside in the North Texas winter. Move the tree indoors when temperatures drop below 35-45°F. You can return it outside after March 21st-April 1st (after last frost and when nights are warm again). When you bring them indoors, move container trees inside to a sunny location and mist leaves to provide humidity. Fertilize sparingly. If you would like to try to produce a few winter lemons, use a dry paintbrush to help pollination by moving pollen from bloom-to-bloom every day.

Industry Expectations and My Experience

According to industry standards and depending on the age of the starter tree, you should see blooms and fruit in 3-5 years. If it is in a gallon sized container, it shouldn't need repotting for 2-3 years. My experience has been different from industry expectations, but I do baby and spoil Leonard more than most would consider sane. In the summer, I check him every day for pests, yellow leaves and soil moisture level, muttering sweet nothings to him all the way. I move him to my covered patio at ANY CHANCE of bad storms. I apply citrus-specific fertilizer once a month during the growing season, adding potash and potassium when needed. I also get his soil analyzed every January. I created an indoor sanctuary for him in my garage for his winter home, including a heater with a thermostat, humidifier and many grow lights on 16-hour timers.

My experience with overachieving Leonard

Leonard outgrew his gallon container in 5 months. He is now 3 years old, has been repotted 4 times and is now badly in need of a very large nursery pot which normally contains large trees. I have to move him with a heavy-duty pot mover. My overachieving Meyer lemon produced 98 lemons his very first year. This year, he currently has over 175 lemons growing and is still blooming. His second year, I kept him inside the house, instead of his garage oasis, far too long. Sadly, he dropped most of his blooms and only produced 1 sad, small, bitter lemon.



Photos of "Leonard" the Meyer Lemon by DCMGA member Martha Cantrell.



Meyer Lemons (Cont.)

Moral of the Story

Whether you are a normal gardener or a nut like me, it isn't easy to successfully grow a Meyer Lemon in Zone 8. It requires close observance and extra care to survive here, much less become a good fruit producer. But let me assure you, despite all the struggles and extra effort it takes to grow a successful Meyer lemon tree, it is possible and worth every bit of the blood (from their big thorns), sweat and tears you invest, when you pick and taste your first homegrown and incredibly sweet fruit of your labor!

Resources

- *Citrus – Fruit & nut resources* Fruit & nut resources. (n.d.). <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/fact-sheets/citrus/>
- *Citrus x limon “Meyer” (Meyer Lemon)* | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox. (n.d.). <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/citrus-x-limon-meyer/>
- *Grow your own lemons.* (n.d.). <https://extension.psu.edu/grow-your-own-lemons>
- Pokorny, K. (2024, June 10). *Pucker up, it's time to talk lemons.* OSU Extension Service. <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/pucker-its-time-talk-lemons>

North Texas Gardening Tips

Timely Articles from [DCMGA](#) and [The Root](#)

[Preserving Your Harvest \(The Root, Feature, July 2022\)](#)

[Poison Hemlock vs. Wild Carrot \(Queen Anne's Lace\) \(Garden Basics\)](#)

[Growing Tomatoes in the Fall \(Plant of the Month July 2020\)](#)

[Lasagna Gardening \(The Root, Help Desk, July 2021\)](#)

[Self-Watering Planter Gardening, An Alternative Irrigation Method \(The Root, July 2024\)](#)



The Class of 2025: Cultivating a Legacy of Service!

BY KIM WOOTTON, DCMGA CLASS PLANNING CHAIRPERSON

The Denton County Master Gardener Association is thrilled to celebrate the Class of 2025 interns, who successfully completed their comprehensive training April 30. Each intern dedicated a minimum of 70 hours to immersive learning, covering essential topics from turfgrass culture and Integrated Pest Management to environmentally conscious Earth-Kind® practices.

Innovations this year, such as collaborative mentoring PODS and increased hands-on learning, were met with great enthusiasm. A highlight was their exploration and presentation of DCMGA's diverse projects, effectively showcasing the positive impact Master Gardeners have across Denton County.

The commitment of this class is truly exceptional. We proudly announce 46 interns finished their training, and an astounding 23 have surpassed their volunteer service requirements. Impressively, 15 of these dedicated individuals have already each volunteered over 100 hours, embodying our mission to "educate and inspire Denton County residents through research-based horticulture."



Photos courtesy of DCMGA Member Becky Collins



Feature Article: Turn Your Hell Strip into a Pollinator Paradise

BY KAREN GIBSON

What is a Hell Strip?

A Hell Strip is that often neglected strip of yard between sidewalk and street curb. It may have grass struggling to grow in soil that is mostly clay. Or maybe your sidewalk strip won't grow anything due to compaction, deep shade, or hot sun with no irrigation. The Hell Strip didn't receive that name because it was beautiful to look at!

Some benefits to improving the hell strip by incorporating Texas hardy perennial plants are:

- Filtering and absorbing rainwater
- Preventing soil and fertilizer run-off into sewer systems and ultimately into our lakes

Check City Codes and HOA Covenants

If you reside in an HOA, check the covenants to see what/if you are allowed to plant in that area. Arm yourself with knowledge of *Texas State Property Code Section 202.007, Certain Restrictive Covenants Prohibited*:

(a) property owners' association may not include or enforce a provision in a dedicatory instrument that prohibits or restricts a property owner from:

- (1) implementing measures promoting solid-waste composting of vegetation, including grass clippings, leaves, or brush, or leaving grass clippings uncollected on grass;
- (2) installing rain barrels or a rainwater harvesting system;
- (3) implementing efficient irrigation systems, including underground drip or other drip systems; or
- (4) using drought-resistant landscaping or water-conserving natural turf.

The complete code is here: <https://codes.findlaw.com/tx/property-code/prop-sect-202-007.html>. Also, some city codes restrict what you can plant and where you can plant, so be sure to check out your local restrictions.

Safety – Before You Dig!

Before you dig anywhere in your yard for any reason (tree planting, fence installation, etc.), call 811 or visit the Call811 website (<https://call811.com/>) to request a survey of your yard for underground utilities. The request is easy to make. Within a few days, utility locators come by and mark the location of buried utilities with paint or flags. Some municipalities use the sidewalk strip for underground utility cables and piping, so be cognizant that your plants may need to be dug back up in the event of future utility upgrades. For this reason, I do not spend a lot of money on my Hell Strip plantings – most are divisions or seedling starts from existing plants in my gardens.



Hell Strips (Cont.)

Proper Planning

I learned the hard way the importance of proper planning when I renovated my first hell strip in 2019 (*see photos p 10*). I spent several mornings digging down 6–8 inches, removing clay, rocks, concrete aggregate, even water bottles, all left behind by the building contractors! Then, I added new soil and compost, along with decorative pavers. It looked beautiful and was ready for planting. Two days later, we received 5 inches of rain in just a couple of hours. Two-thirds of my new soil washed away. I had not taken into account the natural water flow from a nearby swale that drained water from the backyards of two properties. The good news? I now knew where to accommodate the natural flow of water through the Hell Strip!

You may decide it is too much work to remove the bad soil in your Hell Strip. When I removed the grass and weeds from my second Hell Strip (*see photos p 12*), I did not remove/replace the soil. Instead, I loosened the existing compacted soil with a spading fork. Then I added compost and worked it into the soil as much as possible. I was careful not to add so much that it created a mound that would wash away with the first rain. And now, each spring and fall, I add a bit more mulch on top of the bed.

Proper Plants

Now comes the fun part – choosing your plants. Keep the following in mind:

- Height and Width – plants should not be so high or wide that they impede sight or traffic on both the street and the sidewalk
- Water – does your Hell Strip have irrigation already? Will you be adding drip lines? Or will your plants have to rely upon rainwater?
- Sun/Shade – how much sun/shade does your Hell Strip receive? Is it east (morning) sun or west (afternoon) sun?
- Heat sinks – items such as brick mailboxes, decorative boulders, and landscaping pavers will add to the heat of your renovated Hell Strip.
- Neighborhood dogs, rabbits, and children – all will be attracted to your Hell Strip, so choose non-poisonous plants.

I recommend using tough native perennials and planting in the fall, so the roots have time to establish before our harsh summer heat sets in. It's important to water them throughout this time. Low grasses work great, as do ground covers. Currently, my Hell Strips have annual bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*), autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*), skullcap (*Scutellaria* sp.), Zexmenia (*Wedelia acapulcensis* var. *hispida*), Guara (*Guara lindheimeri*), and Blackfoot Daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*). I've also planted various spring bulbs, sedums, and winter violas.



Hell Strips (Cont.)



First, I removed several inches of the old soil, clay, concrete chunks and debris.



Looks great, doesn't it? Ready to plant!



Second, I layered cardboard to hopefully prevent weeds from sprouting. Then layers of compost and new soil.

Photos courtesy of DCMGA Member Karen Gibson



Five inches of rain created a channel and washed away a lot of soil & mulch.



Hell Strips (Cont.)

You can find more native perennial suggestions on the DCMGA Website:

- Drought-Tolerant Summer Bloomers for North Texas (The Root, June 2023) <https://dcmga.com/root-2023-06#page=12>
- Native Gems, Master Gardener Favorite Plants for Your North Texas Garden (The Root, March 2025) <https://dcmga.com/root-2025-03#page=16>
- Plant Facts, <https://www.dcmga.com/learn-more/plant-facts/>

I hope this has inspired you to tackle your Hell Strip. I enjoy mine and so do my neighbors – several have inquired about what a particular plant might be so they can add it to their yard!

Resources

- *Texas Property Code Section 202.007 – Certain restrictive covenants prohibited.* (n.d.-b). Texas.Public.Law. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from https://texas.public.law/statutes/tex._prop._code_section_202.007
- Browning, S. (2023, August 2). *Boost Landscape Appeal with a Curb Strip Garden* | UNL Water | Nebraska. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from <https://water.unl.edu/article/lawns-gardens-landscapes/boost-landscape-appeal-curb-strip-garden/>
- Breeding, L. (2021, July 30). *Flower Mound HOA wants uniformity. Homeowner wants to save water, fights back.* Denton Record-Chronicle. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from https://dentonrc.com/news/environmental_issues/flower-mound-hoa-wants-uniformity-homeowner-wants-to-save-water-fights-back/article_ba79b130-9676-55ae-9ca5-2d711320086f.html
- Sundberg, M. (2018, May 15). *Hellstrip plantings: creating habitat in the space between the sidewalk and the curb.* Ecological Landscape Alliance. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from <https://www.ecolandscaping.org/05/designing-ecological-landscapes/native-plants/hellstrip-plantings-creating-habitat-in-the-space-between-the-sidewalk-and-the-curb/>
- Penick, P. (2018, December 31). *Heavenly Hellstrips.* Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from <https://www.wildflower.org/magazine/native-plants/heavenly-hellstrips>



Hell Strips (Cont.)



I created a rock channel for future water to drain through, added some landscape bricks to funnel water into the channel or down the driveway. Now it's ready to plant!



One year later, May 2020, Mystic Spires Salvia, Lantana, Sedum, Iris.



Photos courtesy of DCMGA Member Karen Gibson

Second Hell Strip, Spring 2025 - bluebonnets, daisies, violas.



Project Spotlight: The Grove

BY LIZ CHANEY, SUE HUDIBURGH AND PAT MOYER

A Collaborative Community Initiative

The Grove is a standout Denton County Master Gardener Association (DCMGA) project at the Sandy Jacobs Government Annex in Carrollton, TX. It was built in close collaboration with several county organizations and DCMGA. In 2015, County Commissioner Machant challenged DCMGA to develop a fruit and nut grove as a demonstration garden that could also provide produce for local food banks. The initial designs for The Grove were developed by the Gardenscapers, a DCMGA Team, using Texas AgriLife guidelines. This collaboration between government, gardening enthusiasts, and local extension services ensured that the project wasn't merely decorative but deeply grounded in science and community needs.

Built for Sustainability and Education

Between 2016 and 2017, the project underwent groundbreaking development and planting installation. The plan included the incorporation of a varied selection of fruit and nut tree species, including blackberries, grapes, peaches, plums, pears, figs, jujubes, persimmons, and pecans. The specific fruit varieties were selected based on Texas AgriLife Extension recommendations. This process guaranteed that only species best suited to the region were integrated, ensuring longevity and productivity that benefits the community for years to come.

Impact Through Green Innovations

In 2020, the project further grew with the addition of a gazebo and the inception of an Earth-Kind® landscaping pollinator garden. This garden demonstrates sustainable practices: it promotes water conservation, reduced reliance on chemical fertilizers



Photos courtesy of DCMGA Member



The Grove (Cont.)

and pesticides, energy conservation, and minimal waste generation. By planting only native and adapted species, the garden not only supports local bee, butterfly, and insect populations but may also boost pollination for nearby production plants, potentially leading to increased food production.

Community Benefits and Future Goals

To date, The Grove has provided over 700 pounds of produce to charitable organizations, representing its strong community support and its role as a live demonstration of local food production. The initiative relies on an array of DCMGA resources such as Path to Plate Fruit Fact Sheets, Gardening Basics Series, Grow Your Landscape, and Earth-Kind[®] Landscapes. Beyond producing food, the project also hosts periodic open houses for the public, which are advertised locally in Carrollton as well as county-wide through DCMGA. These events allow our association to use this educational and demonstration site in the manner for which it was intended and fulfills long-term plans to deepen community engagement and learning around sustainable agriculture and pollinator health.



Photos courtesy of DCMGA Member

Resources

- Fruit and nut production – Fruit & nut resources Fruit & nut resources. (n.d.). <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/>
- The Denton County Master Gardener Association. (2025a, April 30). GroW – Denton County Master Gardener Association. Denton County Master Gardener Association. <https://www.dcmga.com/select-and-grow/grow/>
- The Denton County Master Gardener Association. (2025b, May 6). Garden Help Desk – Denton County Master Gardener Association. Denton County Master Gardener Association. <https://www.dcmga.com/maintain-and-solve-problems/maintain/garden-help-desk/>
- The Denton County Master Gardener Association. (2025c, May 6). Plan – Denton County Master Gardener Association. Denton County Master Gardener Association. <https://www.dcmga.com/plan-and-prepare/plan/>



You're Invited

July 2025, Monthly General Meeting & Program

"The Journey of Your Water & Why
Conservation Matters!"



Join Blake Alldredge from the Upper Trinity Regional Water District to learn about the rigorous eight-step treatment process, cutting-edge technology, and strict quality testing that ensures safe drinking water, along with the vital role of water conservation in protecting our community.

July 9, 2025, 10 am

Global Spheres Center, Solomon's Porch
7801 S Interstate 35E, Corinth, TX 76210



Creature Corner: Paper Wasps

BY JANICE YODER-SMITH

Wasps scare some people and intrigue others. Social (vespid) wasp species found in north-central Texas help limit populations of some beetle larvae and undesirable caterpillars, including army and hornworms, by feeding on their larvae.

The most common social wasps in this area are paper wasps. They are usually 0.75-1 inch (19-25 mm) with long, dark-colored wings and have thin bodies with narrow waists. *Polistes exclamans* bears horizontal dark reddish-brown and yellow abdominal bands that confuse some observers into calling them yellow jackets, but they are not the same. The redder-brown *Polistes carolina*, with no yellow abdominal bands, is less often mislabeled.

Fertilized females emerge from winter shelters when temperatures stay consistently warm in the spring. They chew wood fibers from nearby structures and use them to suspend a nest from a single, thin stalk, typically under an eave or in a high corner. Alternative nest sites include shrubs, garages, sheds, and window ledges. As eggs laid by the nest foundresses mature, one becomes the queen; the others become sterile females. They expand the nest by adding more hexagonal cells to the periphery to host larvae. Sterile adult females bring insect larvae, including caterpillars, to feed them. Adults feed on nectar from nearby flowers, sometimes transferring pollen in the process. Mature nests may house dozens of wasps and may be 6-8 inches (15-20 cm) in diameter. Nest cells remain open until larvae begin pupation.

Paper wasps in the Denton County area produce one generation per year. Nest populations peak in late summer as new fertile females develop. Fertile males emerge a few weeks later. Cold weather and decreased food supply kill males and sterile females. Fertilized females shelter under bark, leaf litter, or in the walls of houses over winter. Nests are not reused.



Polistes Wasp

<https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/52756-Polistes>
Photo 47464049. (c) Fitz Clarke. some rights reserved
(CC BY-NC)



Paper Wasp Nest

<https://www.inaturalist.org/photos/228573415>
Photo 228573415. (c) Nicholas Stockmaster. some rights reserved (CC BY-NC)



Paper Wasps (Cont.)

While paper wasps generally ignore humans and animals, they defend their nests if threatened. Each can sting its target multiple times, forcing the threat to leave the area. Wasps return to their nest when they feel safe. Paper wasps are most active during the day. By evening, they re-enter their nest. Because they help control undesirable caterpillar and other insect larvae damage, leaving their nest in place is the best practice.

Avoiding wasp nests, removing attractants, and keeping trash containers closed are effective measures to prevent being stung by wasps. An NIH study documented that a mixture of clove, geranium, lemon grass, and rosemary essential oils repelled the social wasp species from baits that would usually attract them. Spraying likely nesting sites with such a mix may prevent nest building. While many people say that painting outdoor ceilings “haint” blue deters paper wasps from building nests there, no scientific data supports that practice.

Pain from a single wasp sting typically lasts for a few minutes to an hour for most people. Pain from many simultaneous stings may become unbearable and may require medical intervention. Individuals who find a nest in a high human or pet traffic area may wish to destroy a wasp nest.

The best time to kill a paper wasp nest is in late evening when the nest is still small and the wasps have returned to the nest. Using a powerful jet of soapy water or vinegar to spray the nests often kills paper wasps. Observe the nest for a few days. Repeat treatment if the nest remains active; otherwise, remove it. If using a pesticide, select a product specifically labeled for wasps and follow the directions carefully. Hiring a licensed pesticide service may be the best option for individuals allergic to wasp stings. More information about wasp stings and controls is provided in the resource section at the end of the article.

Resources

- Paper Wasp – Field guide to common Texas insects. (2017, July 12). *Field Guide to Common Texas Insects*. <https://texasinsects.tamu.edu/paper-wasp/>
- Paper wasps – Texas Apiary Inspection Service (TAIS). (2019, July 11). *Texas Apiary Inspection Service (TAIS)*. <https://txbeeinspection.tamu.edu/public/bee-identification/paper-wasp/>
- IPM Action Plan for Paper wasps | School Integrated Pest Management. (n.d.). <https://schoolipm.tamu.edu/forms/pest-management-plans/ipm-action-plan-for-paper-wasps/>
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- Hill, C. A., MacDonald, J. F., & Department of Entomology. (n.d.). Stinging insects and medical risk (E-248-W). <https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-248.pdf>



Oversummering Tomatoes

BY DONNA HULL

Tomato plants are coming into their own right now in North Texas. This is the time that tomato growers all look forward to – juicy, freshly ripened tomatoes, full of flavor. However, we also know what follows: by mid-July, the vines will appear stressed due to excessive heat and the diseases that accompany this stress. At that point, a decision has to be made: should they stay or should they go (now!)? Do you remove these plants and say goodbye until next year, or try to keep them going until better times return?

As usual, the answer isn't a simple yes or no. Most gardeners in North Texas remove their tomato plants when the heat sets in and leaves begin to die. General wisdom suggests planting new transplants at the beginning of July for a fall harvest, although this is not without its challenges due to the dry, hot weather.

Dr. Masabni from Texas A&M promotes succession planting tomatoes three times – first in April, then in late June, early July, and a third time in August. According to Dr. Masabni, one never has to be without fresh tomatoes from April to October!

If you have the right varieties and are willing to invest some time and TLC, your original tomatoes planted in April can survive until fall. There will be a non-fruiting period from mid- to late-July through August, but new growth will resume with the arrival of cooler temperatures in September. To oversummer your tomatoes, choose small fruit varieties, such as cherry or Roma-type tomatoes. Smaller varieties tend to be more heat-tolerant and are also more likely to set fruit into the mid-90s, particularly if they have a little afternoon shade to protect them from the intense afternoon sun. If you're looking to give it a try, here are some tips to help you keep your tomatoes alive in the Texas heat until they can thrive again.

- Choose only your healthiest plants and remove all diseased leaves and stems from them. If indeterminates have grown long, cut them back to allow for new growth in late summer or early fall. Be sure not to cut off *all* newer green growth, however.
- Add 2-3" of mulch around the base of the stem. This will help the soil retain moisture, stay cooler, and help the roots avoid temperature extremes.



Photos courtesy of DCMGA Member Donna Hull

Cherry-size tomatoes generally oversummer well.



Oversummering Tomatoes (Cont.)

- Water deeply and water in the morning. Plants are less stressed after a cooler night and can take up water and nutrients more readily in the morning hours. There will also be less water lost to evaporation, and plants can dry off during the day in the sun, reducing the chances of acquiring more fungal disease. Plants that are normally watered every 2-3 days will need more frequent watering when temperatures exceed 100 degrees. But be careful not to over water!
- Do not fertilize the plants during the extreme heat, but wait until those cooler nights and low 90s return in late August/September and then provide plants the boost they need.
- If you can give a little shade, do it. Some sites are blessed with a tree or other structure that reduces the intensity of the afternoon sun. Shade cloth with a 40-50% light reduction is a good option, and be sure that the cloth does not come directly into contact with the foliage.

Tomato specialists are always working to create new varieties that can withstand the Texas heat. Check with Texas A&M and local nurseries to find out the best and newest heat-loving varieties. Varieties found in the resources below include Heatwave, Heatmaster, Sunmaster, Solar Fire, and Solar Set. This author has had success oversummering Supersweet 100, Cherry Bomb, 4th of July, Arkansas Traveler, Roma, and Celebrity. Good luck and enjoy those tomatoes!

Resources

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- Russell, A. (2025, April 24). *Tips for gardeners during a Texas heat wave*. AgriLife Today. <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2022/07/14/tips-for-gardeners-during-a-texas-heat-wave/>
- Team, D. H. D. (2022, July 1). *My tomato production stops in the summer. Is it possible to harvest tomatoes in hot weather?* Dallas County Master Gardeners Association. <https://dallascountymastergardeners.org/my-tomato-production-stops-in-the-summer-is-it-possible-to-harvest-tomatoes-in-hot-weather/>
- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. (2025, March 14). *Easy Gardening: Tomatoes - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service*. Texas a&M AgriLife Extension Service. <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/asset-external/easy-gardening-tomatoes/>



Cooking with Herbs

BY TRISH PERCY

If gardening intimidates you, one of the easiest things you can start with is herbs. Fresh herbs taste better, and they don't last very long in the refrigerator. Even better, you can grow them practically anywhere – in pots, in the ground, in raised beds, even in a glass of water on the windowsill!

The first herb many people grow is basil. It's not temperamental, and you can buy a hydroponic basil at the grocery store and keep it for a long time. Consider making your own Caprese salad with fresh tomato slices, store-bought fresh mozzarella, and basil leaves (cut a few as needed and let the plant continue to grow). Then, add a pinch of salt and pepper, drizzle with olive oil, and finish with balsamic vinegar. So easy! If you want to get a little feisty, you could also add avocado and bacon.

I love to cook with herbs, and I learned years ago that when herbs are fresh, they don't have the concentrated flavor of dried herbs, so you need to use more. Certain herbs go well with certain foods – dill weed and chives with sour cream, rosemary and thyme with steak, parsley in soups and sauces (it adds so much nutrition!) When I make salmon cakes I make an aioli, which is a fancy name for a thick dipping sauce, using sour cream, dill weed, chives, green onions and garlic. Everything is “to taste” when you use herbs, so experiment to see what you like!

One of my favorite dishes to prepare is a mushroom cream sauce. I sauté the mushrooms in butter, seasoning with salt and pepper. Then I add heavy cream and Italian seasoning or herbs de Provence, as they seem to pair well with the mushrooms. It pulls together quickly, and we love it over chicken or steak.

For a quick appetizer, my husband makes guacamole, and we usually add a pico de gallo to it – diced tomatoes, jalapenos, and onions, seasoned with salt, pepper, lime juice, and chopped fresh cilantro. We mash the avocado and then add the pico, along with an additional dash of salt and lime.



Pico de gallo

PNam Nguyen, CC-BY-ND 3.0 US
<https://thechronicles.com/2016/06/14/fresh-and-easy-pico-de-gallo>



Herbs (Cont.)

Cooking with herbs adds flavor and a personal touch to everything you make, so don't be afraid to try a spice mix or to create your own. One of my favorite blends is called Adobo, and it has a wonderful smoky flavor that I love to use in my chicken and black bean enchiladas. Enjoy!

Resources

- Monday, R., Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Bludau, G., Lyssy, K., Hertzler, A. A., & Hertzler, A. A. (2021). Cooking with herbs. <https://teea.tamu.edu/files/2021/11/Cooking-with-Herbs-FINAL.pdf>
- Chronicles, V. a. P. B. C. (2016, June 14). Fresh and Easy Pico de Gallo. <https://theculinarychronicles.com/2016/06/14/fresh-and-easy-pico-de-gallo/>



In The Veggie Patch: Sweet Potatoes

BY DONNA HULL

Origins and Benefits

Sweet potatoes are one of the largest commercially grown crops in the world, prized for their ability to provide starches, dietary fiber, and protein to millions of people. This vegetable is also rich in a number of vitamins and minerals, particularly beta-carotenes, which are necessary for the production of Vitamin A in our bodies. In the U.S. today, hundreds of varieties of inedible sweet potatoes are grown ornamentally for their flowers or as ground cover in the landscape. This article focuses only on growing varieties of sweet potato which are edible (and delicious!).

Plant Requirements

- **Soil:** Sweet potatoes prefer to grow in sandy loam, but can grow in clay soil that has been amended with compost to improve drainage. Beds should be worked at least 8" and raised if possible. Do a soil test to determine nutrient needs; most north Texas soils will only require nitrogen.
- **Light:** Full sun is required.
- **Temperature:** Sweet potatoes thrive in extremely hot daytime temperatures and warm nights. Soil temperature must be above 55°F, as root damage occurs at temperatures below 55°F.



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Planting

Sweet potatoes are propagated from "slips", rooted sprouts that are grown from a sweet potato. To grow your own slips, see the resources below for detailed instructions. Slips can also be purchased online or at some local nurseries. Plant 12" apart in rows 3'-4' apart when soil temperatures are consistently 65°F or above and at least 120-150 days before the soil temperature is likely to fall below 55°F in the fall. In North Texas, this translates to planting in May to mid-June.

Maintenance and Care

Water regularly while the slips are getting established. Sweet potatoes need 10-20" of water per season, so water deeply at least 1-2 times per week during the growing season. The most common diseases to affect sweet potatoes are bacterial and fungal diseases, nematodes, and viruses. Try to avoid wetting the leaves when watering, or water early in the morning to give the leaves time to dry.



In The Veggie Patch: Sweet Potatoes (Cont.)

Insects attracted to these vines include a variety of beetles (sweet potato flea beetle, click beetle, scarab beetle), armyworms, and caterpillars. On a macro-scale be aware that rabbits love to eat new sweet potato leaves and a barrier between them and their potential meal is advisable!

Varieties for North Texas

The best varieties to grow in North Texas include: Beauregard, Centennial, Jewel and Vardaman.

Harvesting and Storage

Do not water sweet potatoes in the 2-3 weeks prior to harvesting. Sweet potatoes are mature when the leaves turn yellow, indicating that growth has stopped. This occurs generally 120-150 days after planting, depending on the variety. Harvest before the soil temperatures drop below 55°F.

Lift sweet potatoes gently out of the ground; they have thin skins and bruise easily. Do not wash the harvested potatoes, but allow them to cure (heal their wounds and thicken the skin) for 7-10 days in a location at 80-90°F with high humidity (up to 90% if possible). Sweet potatoes store best at 55-60°F, 77-85% relative humidity with some ventilation.

Resources

- Masabni, J., King, S., Texas A&M Department of Horticultural Sciences, Texas A&M University System, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M AgriLife Communications, & Angel, C. (2013). *Sweet potatoes* [Easy Gardening]. <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2010/10/EHT-026-Easy-Gardening-Sweet-Potatoes.pdf>
- Laveriano-Santos, E. P., López-Yerena, A., Jaime-Rodríguez, C., González-Coria, J., Lamuela-Raventós, R. M., Vallverdú-Queralt, A., Romanyà, J., & Pérez, M. (2022). Sweet potato is not simply an abundant food crop: a comprehensive review of its phytochemical constituents, biological activities, and the effects of processing. *Antioxidants*, 11(9), 1648. <https://doi.org/10.3390/antiox11091648>
- *Sweet Potato Production* - Oklahoma State University. (2022, April 1). <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/sweet-potato-production.html>



Gardening Grandma Says...

BY BARBARA BROWN & IVY SUMMERFIELD



Humans transitioned from hunting and gathering to growing food about 12,000 years ago. Over the millennia, they found some tricks to increase their harvest. What they learned, they passed down to their children. Today, some of us are fortunate to have a grandmother, aunt or neighbor who continues the tradition of sharing old-fashioned gardening wisdom. The Gardening Grandma series puts these tips and tricks to the test of modern science by answering the question: Does it really work? Or, is it a myth?

Gardening Grandma says, “Here is a simple trick to keep aphids away from your plants!”

Aphids are small, soft-bodied insects that suck sap from plants leading to stunted growth, deformed leaves, and wilting. According to Clemson College of Agriculture, “they can vector many viral diseases and can cause significant damage to desired plants if the aphid population is left unchecked.” Aphids produce a sticky waste product called honeydew, which can attract ants. Aphids reproduce rapidly during the spring and summer. Increasing the management challenge, female aphids can produce offspring without the need for male interaction (parthenogenesis). In the fall, aphids engage in sexual reproduction, producing eggs that overwinter.

The Story

To remove aphids, Gardening Grandma uses a clever trap. Taking advantage of the attractiveness to aphids (and other insects) of the color yellow, she places a yellow plastic cup coated with petroleum jelly on 2-foot stakes in the garden. When aphids fly to the yellow “flower,” they get stuck.



Photo courtesy of DCMGA Member Barbara Brown



Gardening Grandma Says... (Cont.)

Truth or Myth, Let's Find Out

Yes, if an aphid lands on the sticky yellow cup, it will get stuck and die. However, most aphids in North Texas are wingless. They will crawl from other infected plants. They can also be carried by wind gusts and even by ants. Because early and consistent control is crucial to safeguard your plants, alternative strategies are necessary to protect them.



Step 1: Detection. Visually inspect your plants once or twice a week. Aphids can occur anywhere on the plants, but they are often found on the underside of the leaves or new growth. What should you look for? According to the Texas Master Gardener Association, "Aphids are tiny true bugs with piercing, sucking mouthparts designed to suck the juices from plants. They are usually wingless and pear-shaped. You can recognize aphids easily by the pair of "cornicles" projecting from their hind ends – two tiny "tailpipes". Aphids are soft-bodied and vary in shape and color."

Step 2: Simple removal. Often, aphids can be removed with a strong spray of water, ensuring the undersides of the leaves are hit with the spray. Then, prune severely infested portions of the plant. Dispose of the cuttings. Do not leave on the ground or place into compost.

Step 3: Place sticky traps at ground level. Yellow sticky traps are commercially available and relatively inexpensive. See the picture.

Step 4: Last resort. If aphids continue to be detected, you may need to use a chemical control. We recommend choosing insecticidal soaps or horticultural oils that cause less harm to beneficial insects than synthetic insecticides such as imidacloprid and bifenthrin.

Resources

- Denton County Master Gardener Association (DCMGA). (2025). Aphid control in vegetable gardens. <https://www.dcmga.com/wp-content/uploads/docs/garden-basics-solve/gb-aphid-control-vegetable-gardens.pdf>
- Jeffers, A. (2025, February 13). Integrated Pest Management (I.P.M.) for Aphids | Home & Garden Information Center. Home & Garden Information Center. <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/integrated-pest-management-i-p-m-for-aphids/>
- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. (n.d.). Aphids in Texas. <https://txmg.org/orange/files/2019/09/Aphids.pdf>
- Winski, P. & Dr. Rafia Khan. (2023). GROWER FACT SHEET: APHID Management Guide. <https://extensionentomology.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/aphid-management-guide.pdf>





QUESTION: Do You Have Any Tips for Reducing Landscape Maintenance?

QUESTION: I started my garden almost 20 years ago. Some things have changed, like small trees growing taller and creating more shade. I enjoy having coffee outside in the morning, but now all I can concentrate on is the chores that need to be done in my yard. Is there a way to simplify my design so that I can enjoy my landscape without making a “to-do” list every morning?

ANSWER: None of us is getting any younger! Our energy level often shifts our priorities, leading many gardeners to abandon their high-maintenance plants and remove highly-groomed areas, opting for a more “natural” look.

TO TURF OR NOT TO TURF

By far, sod lawns require the most upkeep in our landscapes. Decide how much upkeep and resources you are willing to devote to having a grassy area. Lawns require constant mowing, pre-emergent for weed control, fertilizer, and 1” of water per week.

During our long summer season, water is not being provided via rain and is often limited by our municipalities. Evaluate the areas in your landscape where sod struggles to survive. (Sunshine is required for ALL types of sod, with the minimum being five hours required for St Augustine in our area.) Ask yourself if these struggling areas should be converted to natural areas, incorporated with shade plants in a nearby existing bed or re-purposed into a shady sitting area or composting center?

A recent trend has been xeriscaping with rock landscapes, but this option is not maintenance-free. Windborne and bird-distributed seeds, combined with our spring and fall rains, can lead to unwanted weeds among the rocks. Select any plants used in this type of landscape with our seasonal rainfall in mind, as it may be too high for desert-type plants. Learn more about xeriscaping:

<https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/asset-external/xeriscape-landscape-water-conservation/>



Help Desk (Cont.)

DESIGN FOR IMPACT

Areas of your landscape that you enjoy most are the areas you (or a potential buyer) can see. Have you ever forgotten about a VERY expensive, or finicky, plant that you have tucked away in the back-of-the-back garden bed? Design your landscape by placing plants where you can appreciate them often, from drive-up appeal when you are returning home, as



well as from inside and outside sitting areas. Place your must-have, high-maintenance plants in these areas to remind you of their presence.

SIMPLIFY YOUR DESIGN

Do you have too many small garden beds that require intricate maneuvers when mowing and edging? Consider combining beds that are in close proximity together into one larger bed with sweeping edges. Stone, metal or quality plastic edging will aid in deterring St Augustine and Zoysia stolons from creeping into your garden beds. Edging should be installed deep enough to slow underground Bermuda or Zoysia sod rhizomes from spreading easily into your garden beds.

START WITH A CLEAN SLATE

For new garden beds, select easy-care plants and start them in a weed-free area to reduce maintenance. Weed cloth is only a temporary solution. Weeds will eventually make their way through the cloth as it ages. Weed-blocking cloth might even prevent a gardener from removing weed roots that extend below the cloth.

For “pops” of color, choose whether you want annuals that require seasonal replacement or perennials that usually require pruning or thinning maintenance. Overcrowding is not fun for people, nor our plants. Allowing good airflow among and between plants reduces places where garden pests can linger unnoticed, as well as the onset of plant disease. Consider using North Texas native plants which require less frequent watering and pest control. (<https://www.npsot.org/chapters/trinity-forks/trinity-forks-resources/tf-what-to-plant/>)



Help Desk (Cont.)

LET NATURE HELP

Use mulch! Two to three inches of composted leaf or bark mulch helps soil retain moisture, reducing the need for excessive watering. Water in the early morning hours to reduce evaporation. Mulch also reduces weeds by blocking sunlight (needed for germination) from undesirable, windblown seeds. Natural areas receive little to no care. Create, or blend your landscape with, natural areas by incorporating Texas native grasses, shrubs or trees.

Extensive landscape design comes at a maintenance cost. Evaluate your plan with the goal of reducing your workload. The time spent on the planning phase will be time well spent.

RESOURCES

- *Earth-Kind® Home – Earth-Kind® Landscaping* Earth-Kind® Landscaping. (n.d.). <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/>
- *Low-Maintenance Landscaping | MU Extension*. (2008, June 1). <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6902>
- *Low maintenance landscaping tips – Urban Programs Travis County*. (2022b, March 17). Urban Programs Travis County. <https://travis-tx.tamu.edu/about-2/horticulture/basic-landscape-design/low-maintenance-landscaping-tips/>
- *soiltesting.tamu.edu*. (n.d.). *Warm season turfgrasses*. https://twri.tamu.edu/media/5432/turfgrasses-jan-14-2020_reorg2.pdf

Denton County Master Gardener YouTube Channel

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

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





Upcoming Events

Denton County Master Gardener Association

Community Strong Farm Work Days

Growing Vegetables for Linda Tutt High School Student Run Grocery & First Refuge Food Bank. All tasks from soil prep to harvesting as the season dictates. We will have a short education on the tasks of the day. Meet Monday mornings in July. 9AM-11AM
1350 Milam Road E., Sanger

LLELA Nature Preserve Workday

Lake Lewisville Environmental Learning Area
201 E Jones St. Lewisville, TX 75057, Meet Wednesdays 9AM-12PM

Flower Mound First Baptist Community Garden

Learn and grow veggies to help the community. Wear comfortable shoes, hat, and sunscreen. Bring water. Meet Thursdays in July 9AM-11AM
1901 Timber Creek, Flower Mound

JULY

8

Houseplant Propagation Techniques

Calling all "plant parents"! As your houseplant collections grow, learn how to propagate and make more plants for yourself, family and friends. Denton County Master Gardeners Linda Barker and Joanne Spurgin will share their tips and demonstrate various methods and techniques on propagating popular houseplants.
10AM-11:30AM

Doubletree Ranch Park 310 Highland Village Rd Highland Village,

JULY

9

Monthly Meeting and Program -Water Conservation and Why it Matters

Join Blake Alldredge from the Upper Trinity Regional Water District to learn about the rigorous eight-step treatment process, cutting-edge technology, and strict quality testing that ensures safe drinking water, along with the vital role of water conservation in protecting our community. The program begins at 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. and is followed by the general business meeting. The public is welcome to attend and grow with us!

Solomon's Porch, Global Spheres Center 7801 S. Int. 35 Corinth 10AM-12PM

JULY

11

Container Gardening

Charlotte Canion, Denton County Master Gardener, will help you plan for beautiful container gardens for your home. If you are cramped for space or just have an area that needs a little pick-me-up, container gardening is for you! 9AM-10AM
Denton Senior Center 509 Bell Avenue, Denton

JULY

12

Free Gardening Class at Community Strong Farm

Join with Denton County Master Gardeners for a free Summertime Gardening Techniques class. Individuals, families & groups are welcome. Bring your lawn chair and all your gardening questions. Gates open at 8AM. You are welcome to come and visit the farm's gardens and new Hoop Houses! Class starts is from 9AM-10AM.

For more information Call Russ 940-577-9794
1350 Milam Road E., (at Tillie Ln.) Sanger

Check our calendar for updated events.

<https://www.dcmga.com/events/>



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Mission Statement

As Master Gardeners, our mission is to educate and inspire Denton County residents through research-based horticulture, to promote eco-friendly gardens and enduring landscapes that enrich our communities.

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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.

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Save the Date

General Meeting & Program,
"The Journey of Your Water &
Why Conservation Matters!"
by Blake Alldredge. Open to
the public.

General Meeting & Program,
Master Naturalist and Park
Guide will discuss building of
Laura W. Bush Native Texas
Park in Dallas. Open to public.

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Content

The submission deadline for the August edition of *The Root* is July 5. Submissions may be revised at the discretion of the editor.

Ideas, photos, and articles are welcome and may be submitted to Communications Director Donna Hull at doctorhull@gmail.com.

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

