NOVEMBER 2025 VOL. 8, NO. 11

Denton County Master Gardener Association

THE ROOT

Grow With Us

Photo Courtesy of Canva.com

WHAT'S GROWING ON

CONNECT WITH US ON THE WEB https://dcmga.com

Buds from the Board

BY RAELINE NOBLES, PRESIDENT

It's November and the air is crisp and the sun is bright. Can't ask for better than that and we here at Denton County Master Gardeners Association (DCMGA) hope you all are enjoying this Texas Fall. We also hope you find this month's *The Root* to be entertaining, educational and find tips that you can use in your own gardens!

November is a very active month for us. There are several year-end events brought to the forefront so that the new year can begin smoothly and successfully for our members and the community. Inside *The Root* you will find our 2026 Board Officers Slate which will be voted on by our membership mid-November. They'll also be voting on next year's budget and a brand new DCMGA Bylaws document. Much work went into all of these documents over several months and I can't express enough thanks to the many individuals involved.

We are also preparing to graduate 45 Interns to Certified Master Gardener status in January. How proud we are of them for their commitment to education and their tenacity to complete the year-long internship experience! They have successfully made it through over 70 hours of training and 70 hours (or more) of volunteer service at our 45 area projects, events and committees during their Intern year. They have learned a tremendous amount of information and earned their certification from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension! We are also so grateful for our Class Planning Administrators, Kim Wootton, Becky Collins, Barbara Beane and a whole host of DCMGA volunteers. Every year they recruit a slate of outstanding professors from Texas A&M and beyond to teach our recruits science-based horticulture. With well over 50 people involved in planning, teaching, mentoring and administrating to make Intern training a reality each year, they are the epitome of "it takes a village" to train and support what I consider to be our brightest future at DCMGA. Congratulations to our soon to be graduated Interns!

Photo courtesy of DCMGA Member Becky Collins

Buds from the Board (Cont).

But that's not all that's happening! On November 6th we are presenting a three day Advanced Training on growing vegetables for 50 Master Gardeners from all over Texas to attend and achieve their Specialist in Vegetables status. This training is in active collaboration with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and has involved months of preparation to ensure our guests and speakers enjoy their stay and learning. The training ends with a tour of Shiloh Gardens in Denton, the largest community garden in the United States which provides over 60,000 pounds of fresh produce to food banks in Tarrant and Denton Counties annually. Hats off to Education Director, Ellen Gauntt, her band of merry volunteers and our AgriLife Extension Agent, Erin Smith, for all they have done for this three-day event.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we are putting finishing touches on the 2025 Strategic Vision review and Annual Member Awards and ramping up to write our nominations for the Texas Master Gardener Association's annual Search for Excellence awards. It's never a dull moment at DCMGA. Always something to do and a deadline to meet. Fortunately, we are gardeners, so rest assured we get our time with hands in the soil, and smiles on our faces after harvesting fall veggies and flowers to enjoy. There's nothing like dirty fingernails after a day in a fall garden. Ahhh. Here's to you having dirty fingernails from your garden, too!

Happy November, everyone – Enjoy this month of coolness, harvest and gratitude.

-Raeline

WHAT TO PLANT IN NOVEMBER

Carrots, spinach, radishes, turnips, mustard greens & more.
This is a great time to plant trees, vines and shrubs.
Plant spring and summer flowering perennials.
You can sow seeds of crimson or white clover as a cover crop, to protect soil and prevent weeds. Cover crops reduce soil erosion and run-off.

CLICK HERE FOR MORE MONTHLY TIPS

There will be a vote by the membership on the 2026 Board slate at the November General Meeting on November 12th. Please be there!

Denton County Master Gardeners Present

Greener Horizons MASTER CLASS SERIES

INTRODUCING DCMGA'S ADVANCED SPEAKER SERIES

THIS EVENING'S PRESENTATIONS

- **Preserving Your Vegetable Harvest** with Dr. Jenna Anding from 5:00
- **Saving Nature One Pocket Prairie at a Time** Award-winning horticulturist, conservationist, and author Greg Grant will talk about why nature is in trouble and how we can make a difference saving birds, bees, butterflies, and biodiversity through the creation of pocket prairies.. From 6:30

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

$20.00 /PERSON

ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Greener Horizons Master Class Registration Form

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSEY RANCH POCKET PRAIRIE

NOVEMBER 6, 2025

5:00–8:30 PM

THE GREATER DENTON ARTS COUNCIL BUILDING
400 E. HICKORY STREET DENTON, TEXAS

Scan Here To Register

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION Denton County

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is an equal opportunity employer and program provider.

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Feature Article: Tree Selection and Diversity

BY CLARE HARRIS

In North Texas landscapes, only the hardiest trees successfully withstand the area's soils, extreme temperatures, and recurring droughts and floods. Planting a range of tree species is an effective strategy for protecting healthy ecosystems against pests, diseases, and environmental stresses.

Past rapid population growth in the area often involved overplanting a single tree species because it seemed quicker and cheaper. The resulting homogeneity favored reproduction of pests and diseases that attack that species while simultaneously decreasing the number of natural limits to that reproduction. The Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive beetle, devastated local communities with high percentages of ash trees. Similarly, Oak Wilt, a deadly fungal disease affecting live oaks and red oaks, spread rapidly when one tree species dominated an area. By diversifying our tree species, we reduce the risk that a single threat could wipe out large portions of the tree canopy.

Years of forestry research resulted in the following recommended practices.

Apply the 10-20-30 rule to prevent over-reliance on any single tree type.

- No more than 10% of one species - e.g., live oak (Quercus virginiana)
- No more than 20% of one genus - e.g., oak (Quercus)
- No more than 30% of one family - e.g., beech (Fagacae)

Use native and well-adapted trees because they require less water, resist local pests, and provide habitat support for wildlife. The Texas Forest Service's Tree Planting Guide recommends native and adaptive trees for North Texas, including:

- Bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*)
- Cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*)
- Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*)
- Chinquapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*)
- Bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)
- Texas redbud (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis*)

. Photo courtesy of Canva.com

Eastern Red Bud tree in bloom

Photo Courtesy of DCMGA member Clare Harris

Eastern Red Bud in foreground

Tree Selection and Diversity (Cont.)

Avoid overused and problematic species.

- While some trees are popular for their fast growth, they can cause problems in the long term. Avoid overplanting:
- Bradford pear: Highly invasive and prone to splitting
- Arizona ash: Short lifespan and pest-prone
- Silver maple: Weak wood and shallow roots that damage sidewalks
- Tree of heaven: Invasive and hosts the spotted lanternfly

Match the tree to the site by assessing the site's characteristics, including:

- Soil: Cedar elm and chinquapin oak are well-adapted to the alkaline, compacted clay soils of North Texas. Arizona ash struggles in clay but performs better in areas with sandy soils in North Texas.
- Sunlight: Full sun is common in many North Texas yards. Choose sun-tolerant species and use larger trees to offer shade to less sun-tolerant understory species.
- Water and drought: Many native species, such as cedar elm and live oak, possess deep root systems enabling them to withstand drought. Smaller Texas persimmon or mesquite can be used if irrigation is limited.
- Space and purpose: Space trees based on their mature tree canopy diameter, height, and root behavior. Large shade trees, such as bur oak, may reach 50-100' tall and develop a canopy 60-80 feet wide with a 10' diameter trunk.
- Plant trees at least half of their mature diameter from a building, sidewalk, driveway, street, or fence.
- Plant trees with mature heights under 15 ft under powerlines.
- Choose freeze-tolerant trees. Plant fruit trees that produce with 600-800 chill hours.

Landscaping with diverse native species and various height trees enhances aesthetics while providing food, nesting sites, and shelter for a range of insects, birds, and small mammals.

- Native species, such as chinquapin oak and cedar elm, produce acorns or seeds that support birds, squirrels, and other wildlife. Understory trees, such as redbuds and Mexican plums, provide blossoms and fruit for early pollinators and insects. Having small, medium, and large trees ensures that there are habitat layers for different insects, birds, and small mammals.
- Large trees, such as live oaks or mature pecans, are resilient to climate stress once they are established. They help moderate temperature, but they require more water and take longer to establish. Medium-sized trees, like cedar elm or chinquapin oak, are more drought-resilient at younger ages. Small trees often survive in challenging locations with urban, compacted soil where large ones fail. When storms and droughts happen, large trees may suffer damage or be lost, but smaller trees can survive and replace them over time.

Tree Selection and Diversity (Cont.)

Trees benefit the North Texas ecosystem.

- **Shade and cooling: Taller trees cast wide shade, producing cooler microclimates under their canopies, which reduces the heat island effect in urban areas and lowers energy costs.**
- **Stormwater management: Canopies intercept rainfall, and leaves and branches slow down water, reducing runoff and allowing more water to soak into the soil.**
- **Carbon storage: Larger trees store much more carbon per tree due to greater biomass. However, younger/smaller trees are important for ongoing carbon uptake during growth phases.**

Examples of native or well-adapted trees in North Texas grouped by their mature height are shown in the table below.

Height Class	Examples	Role and Benefits
Large/canopy trees (50-100+ ft)	- Pecan (*Carya illinoinensis*) - Bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) - Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) or Escarpment Texas live oak (*Quercus fusiformis*)	These large trees are the backbone of the canopy. They store large amounts of carbon, provide major shade to cool buildings and roads, intercept rainfall, and support many species of birds and mammals.
Medium trees (30-50 ft)	- Chinquapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*) - Cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*) - Mexican white oak (*Quercus polymorpha*)	Medium trees fill gaps under the large canopy and help with staggered layering. They are often more manageable in suburban lots than large trees, and they still provide strong shade and habitat.
Small/understory/ornamental trees (10-25 ft)	- Texas redbud (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis*) - Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*) - Prairie flameleaf sumac (*Rhus lanceolata*)	These smaller trees are crucial in urban areas where space is limited. They provide early-season flowers for pollinators, require lower maintenance, and act as stepping stones for wildlife.

Tree Selection and Diversity (Cont.)

Each reader can help improve tree diversity in North Texas:

1. Inventory your property: Note how many trees of each species you have.
2. Plant intentionally: Choose less commonly used native trees.
3. Support city diversity goals: Encourage municipalities and HOAs to avoid mass plantings of a single species.
4. Educate neighbors: Share what you learn about species resilience and ecological benefits.
5. Utilize available tools: Free online resources can help you select the right trees for your specific location and conditions.
   a. Texas A&M Forest Service Texas Tree Selector
   b. Native Plant Society of Texas Native Plant Database

Tree diversity is an ecological necessity for North Texas. Trees of varying heights are aesthetically pleasing and play a crucial role in landscape resilience and long-term sustainability. With careful planning, thoughtful species selection, and long-term vision, we can grow a greener, more diverse North Texas—one tree at a time.

Resources:

Benson, D. (2024, May 14). Invasive, Non-native, and Native Texas Tree Species Explained. AgriLife Today. https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2023/02/21/invasive-non-native-and-native-texas-tree-species-explained/

Goodhue, K. (2023, May 24). Tree Species Diversity Increases the Likelihood of Planting Success. Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. https://serc.si.edu/media/press-release/tree-species-diversity-increases-likelihood-planting-success

Native Plant Society of Texas. (2025a, March 10). What To Plant - Native Plant Society of Texas. https://npsot.org/chapters/trinity-forks/trinity-forks-resources/tf-what-to-plant/

Native Plant Society of Texas. (2025b, September 21). Native Plant Database - Native Plant Society of Texas. https://www.npsot.org/resources/native-plants/native-plants-database/

Native Plants for North Texas Landscapes. (n.d.). Denton County Master Gardener Association. https://www.dcmga.com/garden-basics-native-plants-north-texas/

See, B. (n.d.). Great Trees for North Texas. Dallas County Master Gardeners Association. https://dallascountymastergardeners.org/great-trees-for-north-texas

Tree Owner. (n.d.). www.treesaregood.org

Photo courtesy of DCMGA member Clare Harris

Live Oak
(*Quercus virginiana*)

ErikAgar, Getty Images. Courtesy of Canva.com

Bur Oak acorns

Plant of the Month: Valerian

BY JANET GERSHENFELD

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) is a fascinating perennial herb that has been cherished for centuries. It is a member of the Family Caprifoliaceae, which includes honeysuckles, and is native to Europe and Asia. With its delicate pink or white, star-shaped flowers and feathery leaves, valerian is cherished for its beauty and potential medicinal properties. It is native to Europe and Asia, but it also grows in North America.

Valerian's primary pollinators are bees. It also attracts butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds, enhancing the biodiversity of a garden and the genetic diversity of the valerian plant. Valerian flower structures also enable pollen transfer within the same flower. This self-sufficiency ensures that valerian produces seeds even in adverse circumstances. Companion planting valerian with native coneflowers, salvias, monardas, and lavender promotes successful blooms by each plant. If you're considering growing valerian in your garden, here are a few things you need to know about its cultivation.

Valeriana officinalis, CC BY-SA 3.0

Valeriana officinalis

Growing Valerian

Valerian grows best in cool weather (zones 4-7b), but it can grow in Denton County (primarily zone 8a but also zone 8b). It may struggle in hot, dry conditions. It thrives in full sun to partial shade, and prefers moist but well-drained, fertile soil. Enriching the soil with compost before planting improves plant growth.

Consistent soil moisture is key, especially during the growing season. Water regularly, but avoid overwatering, which can lead to root rot. Supplemental water during the hottest part of the summer in the first year can increase survival. Mulching around the base of the plant can help retain soil moisture and suppress weeds.

Pruning valerian after flowering encourages new growth and branching. Removing spent blooms or dried seed heads limits the unwanted wind spread of this prolific self-seeder. Valerian is relatively pest-resistant, with the exception of aphids or slugs which may attack it.

Valerian (Cont.)

Valerian can be grown from seeds, stem cuttings, or root division. Seeds and stem propagation should be sown in early spring, while root division is best done in the fall. Space the plants about 12 to 18 inches apart to allow for proper air circulation and growth. Flowering valerian reaches up to four feet tall.

Health Benefits

Historically, valerian was known for its potential medicinal properties, particularly an ability to promote relaxation and well-being. Some use valerian in tea as a sleep aid as well as a relief agent for muscle cramps and tension headaches. Others suggest a valerian-infused bath for sore muscles. Topically, its uses included over-the-counter products for the treatment of dermatitis, psoriasis, sore muscles, and digestive issues. A link to the National Center of Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) summary of valerian safety and effectiveness is provided in the references below. DCMGA recommends consulting a physician before using any herb as medicine.

Valerian is not a common herb in Texas, but it can enhance the landscape and support pollinators. Gardening is an ongoing experiment. Consider exploring valerian in your garden.

Valeriana officinalis, Mark 1.0 Universal

Valeriana officinalis

Botanical Garden KIT, Karlsruhe, Germany, H. Zell CC BY-SA 3.0

Valerianaceae

Botanical Garden KIT, Karlsruhe, Germany, H. Zell CC BY-SA 3.0

Valerian, inflorescence

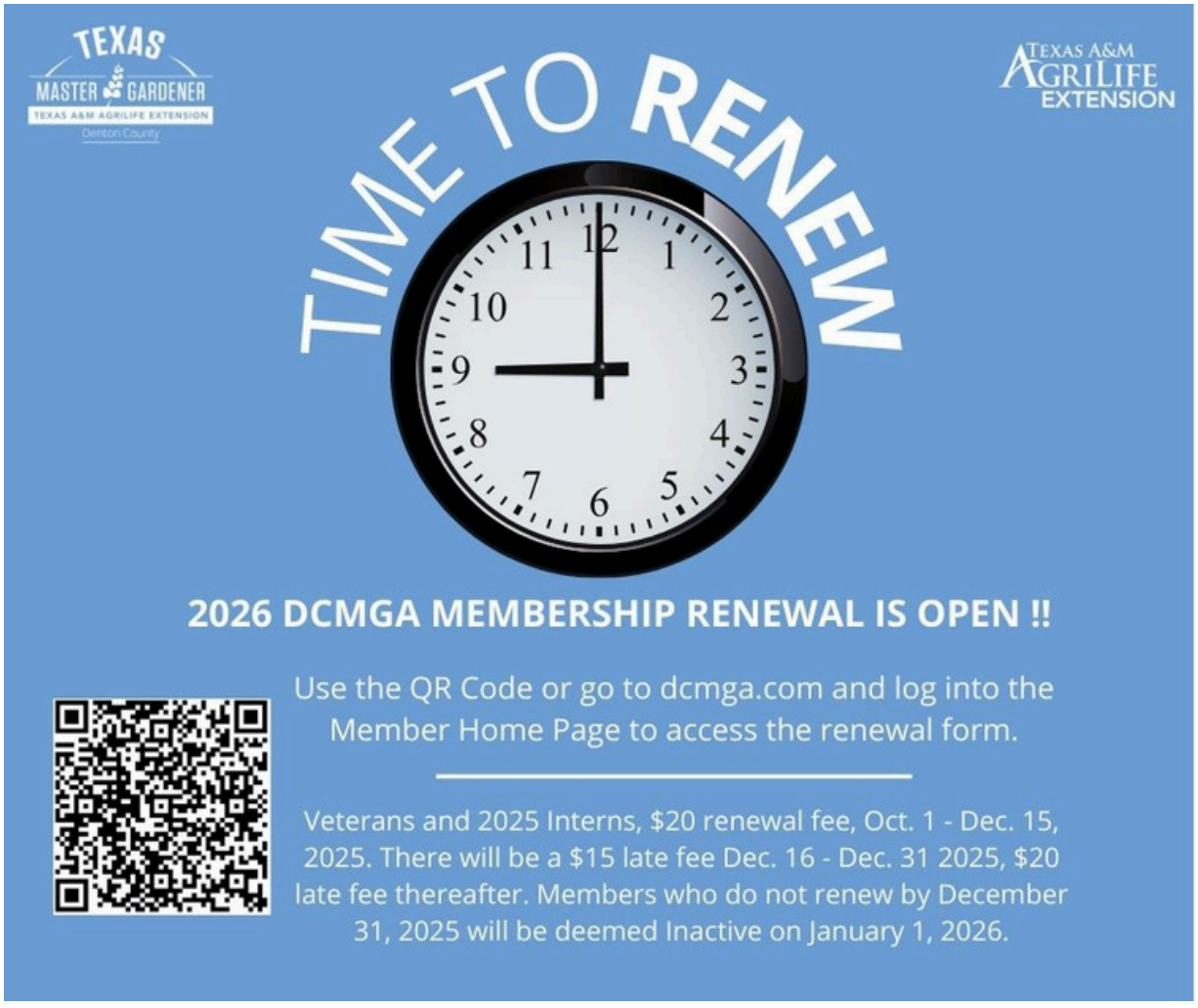
Resources

- BBC Gardeners' World Magazine. (2024, December 4). How to grow valerian. BBC Gardeners World Magazine. https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/how-to-grow-valerian/
- Rankel, K. (2024, November 23). The best pollinators for your valerian 🐝. Greg App 🪴. https://greg.app/pollinate-valerian/

Valerian (Cont.)

Resources (cont.)

- Shekhar, H. C., Joshua, L., & Thomas, J. V. (2023). Standardized Extract of Valeriana officinalis Improves Overall Sleep Quality in Human Subjects with Sleep Complaints: A Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled, Clinical Study. *Advances in Therapy*, *41*(1), 246–261. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12325-023-02708-6
- *Valerian: Usefulness and safety*. (n.d.). NCCIH. https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/valerian
- *Valeriana officinalis (All-heal, Garden Heliotrope, Garden Valerian, Valerian) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox*. (n.d.). https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/valeriana-officinalis/
- *Valeriana officinalis: Identification, Health Benefits, Uses, Invasive Concerns, and Pet Safety*. (n.d.). PlantIDs.com: Your Ultimate Guide to Identifying Plants and Trees. https://plantids.com/3062-valeriana-officinalis.html



Creature Corner: Parasitoids

BY JANICE YODER-SMITH

Parasitoid insects provide control of some beetles, caterpillars, and other insects in gardens and field crops. Just like parasites do, parasitoids have specific hosts. The most significant difference between the two groups is that parasitoids kill their hosts, while parasites do not. Typically, a parasitoid lays eggs in or on the larvae of its insect hosts. When the parasitoid eggs hatch, those larvae either eat the host from the inside out or emerge on the outside of the host and suck it dry. Parasites, in contrast, may take a meal or reproduce within a host, but they allow the host to live to feed them another time.

To attract parasitoids, we need to provide a mixture of herbs and native flowers that offer the nectar they prefer throughout the year. Fennel, coriander, and other herbs from the carrot family attract some parasitoids. Others prefer composite flowers, such as coneflowers, yarrow, and cosmos. Mustard greens and other brassicas attract parasitoids, too. Herbs and brassicas usually taste better to humans before they flower, so planting some for ourselves and some to bloom for the parasitoids is a good practice.

Several kinds of creatures, including parasitoid species, will be discussed in this section, with a focus on wasps and flies. Have you ever observed an insect that seemed to be a wasp or fly but was so small you could barely see it? That may have been a parasitoid! Some are less than one-fourth inch (about 6.4 mm) long. Some have vibrant colors, and others are muted shades of gray, brown, or black.

Many parasitoid flies belong to the Family Tachinidae, specifically the Subfamily Trichopodinae. Each species of these tiny flies, characterized by their bristly heads and bodies, targets a specific grasshopper, beetle, caterpillar, or true bug. *Trichopoda pennipes* lays eggs on squash bugs. When the larvae hatch, they feed on the fluids inside the squash bug, killing it.

Wasp, Cotesia congregata, TCollinsNY, CC-BY-NC

Swift Feather-legged Fly *(Trichopoda pennipes)*

Genus Dusona, ichiomonad wasp, SaylorJ, CC-BY-NC

Genus *Dusona*

Parasitoids (Cont.)

The thousands of parasitoid wasps share some characteristics with parasitoid flies. All are insects, and each parasitoid species has its own preferred hosts. Their adult forms feed on nectar.

The Ichneumonoidea superfamily includes braconid and ichemonid wasps. *Cotesia congregata* is a braconid wasp that lays its eggs in tomato hornworms, killing them as the wasp larvae mature. Some braconid wasps attack aphids. When they mature, they leave behind brown aphid mummies. Some ichneumonid wasp species have adults up to 1.5 inches (38 mm) long. A distinguishing characteristic of ichneumonids is their long abdomen, which is longer than the rest of their body combined. These wasps use their antennae to detect vibrations made by grubs feeding under the bark of living trees. They use their long ovipositors to drill through the wood and lay eggs in the grubs.

The *Trichogramma* wasp species target the Lepidoptera family (moths and butterflies). Some may be purchased and deployed to limit damage from hornworms and other caterpillars to crops. However, those purchased wasps will fly to greener gardens unless there are plenty of nectar plants to feed the adults.

Genus Trichogramma, Mengjinxia, CC-By-NC

Genus *Trichogramma*

Hornworm Parasitoid Wasp. Cotesia congregata. TCollinsNY, CC-BY-NC Hornworm Parasitoid

Hornworm Parasitoid Wasp

Parasitoid flies and wasps are among the small but mighty creatures in our gardens and fields. Let's remember to include flowering plants that will bloom throughout the seasons and support these critical, beneficial insects that help control pest populations.

Resources:

Agricultural Biology. (2023, October 2). Parasitoid Wasps - Agricultural Biology. https://agsci.colostate.edu/agbio/ipm-pests/parasitoid-wasps/

Parasitic Flies (Tachinids). (n.d.). Missouri Department of Conservation. https://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/parasitic-flies-tachinids

Parasitic Wasp - Field Guide to Common Texas Insects. (2018, October 8). Field Guide to Common Texas Insects. https://texasinsects.tamu.edu/parasitic-wasp/

Parasitoid Wasps. (n.d.). University of Maryland Extension. https://extension.umd.edu/resource/parasitoid-wasps/

Porter, P. (2015, July 15). Tachinid flies — Texas Insect Identification Tools. Texas Insect Identification Tools. https://texashighplainsinsects.net/insect-of-the-week/2015/7/10/tachinid-flies

Tachinid and Flesh Flies - Field Guide to Common Texas Insects. (2017, July 10). Field Guide to Common Texas Insects. https://texasinsects.tamu.edu/tachinid-and-flesh-flies/

Green Tomatoes? Start Cooking!

BY DONNA HULL

It has been a very warm autumn, and some fall vegetable gardeners have been enjoying a bumper crop of fall tomatoes. But all good things come to an end, and in the case of Texas tomatoes, that end comes in November. The warmth ends abruptly with our first really impactful cold front and freeze - great for wearing sweaters. Tomatoes? Not so much!

Fortunately, not all is lost. You can pick those green tomatoes, and if they are far enough along, some of them will ripen nicely indoors. But not all. Some are just "too green" (too young) to ripen. What to do? Start cooking!

There are a number of recipes online for making delicious use of green tomatoes. Fried green tomatoes, pickled green tomatoes, and green tomato chutney are just a few options. My favorite is to make green tomato salsa. Here's one recipe I've used from the *New York Times*. Roasting is very important - it helps mellow the tartness of these unripe veggies. I also like to add a little garlic - but that's up to you!

McKenna Ringwald, Getty Images. Courtesy of Canva.com

Keep Those Green Tomatoes!

Green Tomato Salsa Verde

From the New York Times

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound green tomatoes
- 2 to 3 jalapeño or serrano peppers (more to taste)
- ½ medium onion, preferably a white onion, chopped, soaked for five minutes in cold water, drained, rinsed and drained again on paper towels
- Salt to taste
- ½cup roughly chopped cilantro
- ¼ to ½ cup water, as needed (optional)

PREPARATION

Step 1
Preheat the broiler. Line a baking sheet with foil. Place the green tomatoes on the baking sheet, stem-side down, and place under the broiler about 2 inches from the heat. Broil two to five minutes, until charred. Using tongs, turn the tomatoes over, and grill on the other side for two to five minutes, until blackened. Remove from the heat. When cool enough to handle, core the tomatoes and remove the charred skin. Quarter and place in a blender or a food processor fitted with a steel blade (I prefer the blender).

Step 2
Add the remaining ingredients, except the water, to the blender or food processor, and blend to a coarse or a smooth puree (to your taste). Transfer to a bowl, taste and adjust seasonings, and thin out with water if desired. Allow to stand for 30 minutes or longer before serving to allow the flavors to develop. You may wish to thin out after it stands.

Tip
- Advance preparation: This will keep for a couple of days in the refrigerator but is best freshly made.

In The Veggie Patch: Swiss Chard

BY LAURA FRANKLIN

The DFW area may not have the traditional "four calendar seasons," but we do have seasonal vegetables. This month's spotlight is Swiss Chard. It is a leafy green, part of the beet family, and used in similar ways to spinach or kale.

Swiss chard, the "Queen of the Dalmatian Garden," is a worldwide staple of pantry gardens that was originally cultivated around the Mediterranean. Its common name honors a Swiss botany taxonomist who studied the traits of the plant. This leafy green has been praised for centuries for its nutritional benefits, which include vitamins A, C, and K, as well as fiber, iron, and other minerals. Read on for a quick breakdown of growing Swiss chard in your garden.

Recommended Varieties for North Texas

Bright Lights, Bright Yellow, Fordhook Giant, Rhubarb Red, and Lucullus.

Soil, Sun, and Temperature Requirements

Remember to read your seed packet! Choose a sunny spot in well-drained soil with high organic content for your chard. A bit of shade won't bother Swiss Chard. Generally thought of as a cool-weather crop, it thrives when the temperature stays below 75°F during the day with nighttime temperatures in the range of 40 to 45°F. Chard is pretty hardy and can take some daytime heat and light frosts.

Swiss Chard 2 Laura Franklin CC-BY-NC

Swiss Chard

When growing from seed, it is recommended to maintain temperatures between 55°F and 75°F for optimal germination. Plant the spiky seed about 1 inch deep in the soil, spaced about 6 inches apart. This plant is not picky about crowding; it will simply grow smaller leaves.

Water

Like many vegetables, chard requires frequent and consistent watering to thrive.

Maintenance and Care

Because it is a quick-growing plant, there shouldn't be many issues outside of general garden pests, such as aphids, slugs, and flea beetles. It is not common for plant diseases to affect chard. Please refer to the resources section for guidance on managing chard pests and diseases.

Swiss Chard (Cont.)

BY LAURA FRANKLIN

Harvesting and Storage

Like most leafy greens, you can harvest chard a few leaves at a time when they are about 3 inches long, or you can let it grow to maturity and harvest as a whole. It is important not to wash chard until you are ready to use it. Leaves will keep in the refrigerator for one to two weeks or can be kept frozen. When ready to use them, dunk the leaves thoroughly in water to remove dirt and debris.

Recipe

Swiss chard is quite versatile in the kitchen; it can often serve as a substitute for other hearty greens. Separate the leaves from the stems, cooking the stems first, as the leaves wilt quickly, similar to spinach. Sauté as a quick side or add to your soup for a boost of greens!

Resources

Masabni, J. (n.d.). Swiss Chard. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2011/10/swisschard.pdf

Gardening Vegetable Varieties For North Texas. https://wise.agrilife.org/files/2023/01/Gardening-Veggie-Varieties-for-North-TX.pdf

Managing-Insect-And-Mite-Pests-In-Vegetable-Gardens. (n.d.). https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/asset-external/managing-insect-and-mite-pests-in-vegetable-gardens/

The Hmong American Farmers Association "Swiss Chard" https://www.hmongfarmers.com/swiss-chard/

Utah State University Yard and Garden Extension "How to Grow Swiss Chard in Your Garden" https://extension.usu.edu/yardandgarden/research/swiss-chard-in-the-garden

Texas Superstar® Plants

BY MELISSA WEAVER

Extreme heat, unpredictable weather, challenging clay soil—they all work together to make gardening in north Texas seem impossible. Wouldn't it be nice if there was a list of plants chosen for their ability to thrive in Texas's challenging climate and set home gardeners up for success?

Photo Courtesy of DCMGA Member Donna Hull.

Turk's Cap

Well, thanks to the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension Service, there is such a list. Working alongside horticultural professionals and members of the landscape industry, they have developed the Texas Superstar® program that tests and identifies plants that perform well in a variety of conditions across the State of Texas, helping to create beautiful gardens using minimal effort and resources.

How Does a Plant Become a Texas Superstar®?

Only the toughest, most reliable plants make the cut. The Texas Superstar® selection is based on how the plants perform in a garden setting while receiving minimal soil preparation, no pesticides and conservative amounts of water. The plants undergo several years of extensive field trials in plots spread throughout the state--College Station, San Antonio, Overton and Lubbock. These sites represent different climate zones found in Texas.

Texas Superstar® plants must adapt to varying growing conditions across the state. In addition to its many different eco-regions, Texas has eight major soil types, and its precipitation rates vary from 8 inches a year in the west part of the state to 56 inches a year in the southeast.

In addition to being easy for the home gardener to grow as well as adaptive to different growing environments, Texas Superstar® plants must be pest-resistant and attractive. Observers look for plants that have a unique quality that makes them stand out from the others, including heat resistance or ornamental interest. They also must be a plant that the nursery industry can easily grow to provide sufficient plants to meet the consumer demand.

Currently there are over 90 plants identified as a Texas Superstar®, giving the home gardener lots of choices. This mix of native and adaptive plants includes annuals, perennials, per-annuals (tropical perennials that perform like annuals), shrubs, trees and specialty plants including fruits, vegetables and herbs.

Texas Superstar (Cont.)

How to Find a Superstar

Want to add some of these Texas-tough plants to your garden? Check out area garden centers and home supply stores. They can be identified by the Texas Superstar® logo and label. A list of retailers as well as a complete list and description of each Texas Superstar® plant can be found at www.TexasSuperstar.com. Happy planting!

Gregory Ewton, Getty Images. Courtesy of Canva.com

Golden Columbine

Adey Deresse, Getty Images. Courtesy of Canva.com

Belinda's Dream Rose

Resources

- Big Country Master Gardeners Association. (n.d.). Texas Superstars, Strong and Stunning Plants For Texans [Slide show]. bcmgtx.org. https://bcmgtx.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Texas-Superstar-Presentation.pdf
- Pemberton, B., Arnold, M., Davis, T., Lineberger, D., McKenney, C., Rodriguez, D., Stein, L., Hall, C., Palma, M., & De Los Santos, R. (2011). The Texas Superstar® Program: Success Through Partnership. HortTechnology, 21(6), 698–699. https://doi.org/10.21273/horttech.21.6.698
- Texas Superstar® Plants. (2023, September 14). HOME - Texas Superstar® Plants. https://texassuperstar.com/

North Texas Gardening

Timely Articles from DCMGA and The Root

Landscape Maintenance is for the Birds (November 2019)

Brassica oleracea, 'Romanesco' (November 2018)

Pansies (November 2024)

Best Shade Trees for North Texas (The Root, November 2024)

Gardening Grandma Says...

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, "Your plants can predict the coming weather, watch them and be prepared."

Truth or myth, let's find out!

Folklore is filled with beliefs about the prescience of our plants and animals to tell us when storms are coming, how bad our winters are going to be, and even warn of an impending earthquake or tornadoes. First, let's look at the Gardening Grandma's sayings.

The story with the most history and publicity is probably "Punxsutawney Phil," the groundhog that can predict the possibility of an early spring. As the story goes, if he sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of bad weather; no shadow means an early spring. Another fun plant weather prediction story is about persimmon seeds. If the seed has a spoon-shaped kernel, that means a heavy, wet, snowy winter, while a fork shape indicates a mild winter, and a knife shape suggests a cold, harsh winter with cutting winds.

Other folklore suggests that abundant berry and nut crops suggest a tough winter is coming. And, if the brown band in the middle of a woolly bear caterpillar is wider, it indicates a milder winter.

What Science Tells Us

Here are some interesting "weather-predicting" facts from the plant world.

Gardening Grandma Says... (Cont.)

Cenizo or Texas Sage (Leucophyllum frutescens) is sometimes called the "barometer bush" because it often blooms with purple flowers before rain. Although it is not a definitive predictor, its blooming responds to high humidity and low barometric pressure both associated with an incoming rain event.

Pine trees close their cones when rain is near. Under dry conditions, dehydration drives the pine cone to open. The seeds are then released and carried by wind over long distances. On rainy days, the cone is closed to protect the seeds from escaping; because, in this weather, the seeds would fall too close to the parent plants and not germinate.

"Many flowers, especially pimpernels, dandelions, daisies and chickweed, close their petals long before the first drops of rain fall and some trees, such as maples and poplars, turn their leaves upwards because of the sudden increase in humidity. The undersides of the leaves appear much lighter, almost silvery, and this is a sure sign of approaching rain. Plants, including trees, can also tell when rain is approaching. As the air becomes more moisture-laden, most plants automatically increase oxygen production and this means the scents they give off are much stronger." (McCormick, 2018)

"Many animals have a better sense of hearing and smell than we do, so when humidity, air pressure and wind direction change right before a storm, as well as the distant rumble of thunder, some animals may become restless. They can pick up on weather changes hours before we can..." (Illinois State Climatologist)

"When birds unexpectedly flee their nesting grounds, it may be a demonstration of Mother Nature's early-warning system that a massive storm is approaching." (Yang, 2018)

"The sixth sense of animals: an early warning system for earthquakes? The Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior attached sensors to animals in an earthquake-prone area in Northern Italy and recorded their movements over several months. The movement data show that the animals were unusually restless in the hours before the earthquakes. The closer the animals were to the epicentre of the impending quake, the earlier they started behaving unusually." (MPG, no date).

Cenizo in bloom (Leucophyllum frutescens)
Pyle, Lynn: Wiildflower Center Digital Library
Unrestricted

Conclusion: Many folklore beliefs and old wives' tales suggest that plants and animals can predict the severity of the coming winter or an approaching bad storm. While entertaining, these beliefs have rarely been subjected to formal scientific analysis. So, enjoy and share them as a charming reflection of yesteryear.

Resources

An early warning system for earthquakes? (n.d.). https://www.mpg.de/15126191/earthquakes-animals

Hydration-induced reversible deformation of biological materials. (2020). In Nature Reviews [Article]. https://meyersgroup.ucsd.edu/papers/journals/Meyers%20485.pdf

Leucophyllum frutescens (Texas Barometer Bush, Texas Sage) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox. (n.d.). https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/leucophyllum-frutescens/

McCormick, K. (2018, March 15). Questions from the plant clinic: Weather forecast? - UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County. UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County. https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/seminoleco/2018/03/15/weather-forecast/

October 2010 – Illinois State climatologist. (2010, October 29). https://stateclimatologist.web.illinois.edu/2010/10/

Yang, S. (2015, June 1). Sensing distant tornadoes, birds flew the coop. What tipped them off? - Berkeley News. Berkeley News. https://news.berkeley.edu/2014/12/18/infrasound-as-early-storm-warning-for-birds/

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

DCMGA
HELP DESK
Question of the Month

Help Desk Team Contact Information
940-349-2892
master.gardener@dentoncounty.com

QUESTION: We lost two large white ash trees during the past year and are looking to replace them this fall. Can you suggest a tree that will thrive in Denton County?

QUESTION: We lost two large white ash trees during the past year and are looking to replace them this fall. Can you suggest a tree that will thrive in Denton County?

ANSWER: I'm sorry to hear about your trees. While a white ash tree can adapt to well-draining clay soils that are predominant in our area, these trees are better suited for the slightly acidic soil found in East Texas. The emerald ash borer beetle, with no known effective deterrent or treatment, has devastated this tree species across our state.

We are fortunate that many trees grow well in north central Texas. Fall is a great time to plant a new tree in your landscape because of the cooler temperatures and extra moisture that give the tree time to establish before summer's often extreme heat.

To make the best selection, keep these tips in mind:

- Consider the size of the area where the tree will be planted. Research the mature size of your tree and allow enough room for your tree's roots (spacing away from your home's foundation as well as from solid surfaces, like sidewalks, driveways, patios & pool decks), Also, look up…Are there above-ground wires, window views you don't want to obstruct, or other tree canopies that will prevent your new tree's natural spread?
- Search for trees with light and water requirements best suited to your conditions.
- Determine whether you prefer an evergreen tree, which sheds and replaces its leaves or needles simultaneously, or a deciduous tree, which is bare in the winter after a show of fall color.
- Pay close attention to details such as whether the tree you select is known to shed nuts, cones, seedpods, or even sticky sap.
- Be aware that fast-growing trees are also generally short-lived trees, often needing replacement in 15-25 years.

Help Desk (Cont.)

Plants native to a particular area are more likely to thrive with less irrigation, once established, while maintaining healthy ecosystems and supporting wildlife.

Be sure you plant your tree correctly to give it the best possible start to a long, healthy life.

Finally: before You Dig, be sure to check out the Guidelines for Safe Digging in Texas.
https://811beforeyoudig.com/811-states/state-texas/

Barberelli, Getty Images. Courtesy of Canva.com

Pecan Tree - the State Tree of Texas

The websites in the resources section will help you choose a tree to best suit your growing conditions and instruct you on how to properly plant it. I wish you many happy years and wonderful memories made in the shade of your family's new tree!

Resources:

Emerald Ash Borer - Texas A&M Forest Service. (2025, July 15). Texas a&M Forest Service. https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/trees/invasive-species/invasive-insects/emerald-ash-borer/

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center - the University of Texas at Austin. (n.d.). https://www.wildflower.org/collections/collection.php?collection=TX_northcentral

Planting - Texas A&M Forest Service. (2025, April 15). Texas a&M Forest Service. https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/arborday/plantingsteps/

Texas Tree Selector. (n.d.-a). https://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/viewalltrees.aspx

Texas Tree Selector. (n.d.-b). https://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/CustomSelector.aspx

TreePlantingTools. (n.d.). https://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/TreePlantingTools.html

You're Invited

November 2025, Monthly General Meeting & Program

"Grow Native: Planting for Wildlife & Community"

Lynn Pyle, courtesy of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Join us for an inspiring talk with Mei Ling Liu from the Texas Conservation Alliance to learn how planting native species can restore habitats, support wildlife, and strengthen communities. Whether you're a seasoned nature lover or just getting started, you'll leave with practical tips and fresh ideas for making a real difference!

November 12, 2025, 10 am
Global Spheres Center, Solomon's Porch
7801 S Interstate 35E, Corinth,TX 76210

DENTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

Upcoming Events

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 MONDAYS 9AM-11AM
1350 MILAM ROAD E., SANGER

LLELA NATURE PRESERVE WORKDAY

LAKE LEWISVILLE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA WEDNESDAYS 9AM-12PM
201 E JONES ST. LEWISVILLE, TX 75057

FLOWER MOUND FIRST BAPTIST COMMUNITY GARDEN WORK DAYS

LEARN AND GROW VEGGIES TO HELP THE COMMUNITY. WEAR COMFORTABLE SHOES, HAT ANDSUNSCREEN. BRING WATER. MEET THURSDAYS 8:30AM-10:30AM
1901 TIMBER CREEK, FLOWER MOUND

NOV 8

PLANT PROPAGATION-MAKE YOUR OWN PROPAGATION BOX

COME LEARN MORE ABOUT PLANT PROPAGATION TECHNIQUES, INCLUDING A HANDS-ON WORKSHOP TAUGHT BY DENTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER, LINDA BARKER. EACH PARTICIPANT WILL LEAVE WITH THEIR OWN COMPLETED PROPAGATION BOX AND THE CONFIDENCE TO USE IT AT HOME.
FREE EVENT- 30 MAX ATTENDEES 10:30-11:30 AM
CARROLLTON PUBLIC LIBRARY AT JOSEY RANCH LAKE
1700 KELLER SPRINGS ROAD CARROLLTON

NOV 12

NOVEMBER MONTHLY MEETING & PROGRAM

JOIN US FOR AN INSPIRING TALK WITH MEI LING LIU FROM TEXAS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE! DISCOVER HOW PLANTING NATIVE SPECIES CAN RESTORE ECOSTYTEMS, SUPPORT WILDLIFE AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES. LEARN ABOUT THE GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE PROGRAM AND PARTNERSHIP WITH DALLAS ZOO. MONTHLY BUSINESS MEETING WILL FOLLOW THE PROGRAM. 10AM-12PM
SOLOMON'S PORCH GLOBAL SPHERES 7801 S. INTERSTATE 35, CORINTH 10AM-12PM

NOV 14

GARDENING TECHNIQUES

JOIN US FOR AN INSPIRING PRESENTATION ON GARDENING TECHNIQUES LED BY A CERTIFIED MASTER GARDENER! WHETHER YOU'RE A SEASONED GREEN THUMB OR JUST STARTING OUT, THIS SESSION WILL OFFER PRACTICAL TIPS, SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES, AND CREATIVE IDEAS TO HELP YOUR GARDEN THRIVE.
DENTON SR. CENTER, 509 BELL AVE. DENTON 9AM-10AM

NOV 14

VOLUNTEER AT JOSEY RANCH POCKET PRAIRIE

AND LEARN FROM MASTER GARDENERS AND MASTER NATURALISTS. JOIN US IN OUR EFFORT TO PRESERVE NATURE WHILE LEARNING ABOUT THIS SPECIAL ECOSYSTEM AND HELP US PREPARE THE POCKET PRAIRIE FOR THE 2026 COMMUNITY GARDEN TOUR. BRING WATER, HAT, GLOVES, SMALL TOOLS, SUNSCREEN, AND INSECT REPELLENT.
JOSEY RANCH POCKET PRAIRIE 1700 KELLER SPRINGS, CARROLLTON, 9AM-11AM

NOV DATES

ROOTS & BLOOMS FALL GARDEN SERIES

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES WILL BE PROVIDED AS TO WHAT TO PRUNE, DIVIDE, FERTILIZE, AND MULCH TO ENSURE HEALTH AND NUTRITION TO YOUR GARDEN DURING THE WINTER MONTHS.
NOV 14- BETTY FOSTER PUBLIC LIBRARY, PONDER 11AM-12PM
NOV 18- LAKE DALLAS PUBLIC LIBRARY 6PM-7PM
NOV 20- LITTLE ELM PUBLIC LIBRARY 6:30PM-7:30PM

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
Denton County

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND PROGRAM PROVIDER.

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.

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.

2025 Board of Directors

President	Raeline Nobles
Vice-President	Jeff Hardgrave
Secretary	Lori Barr
Treasurer	Dale Powell
Communications	Donna Hull
Education	Ellen Gauntt
Outreach	Bonnie Ambrose
Member-at-Large	Brenda Martin
CEA-Horticulture	Erin Smith

Social Media

Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/DentonCountyMGA

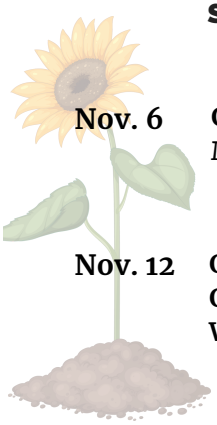
Instagram:
https://www.instagram.com/DentonCountyMGA

X (formerly *Twitter):*
https://twitter.com/DentonCountyMGA

Pinterest:
https://www.pinterest.com/DentonCountyMGA

YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/c/DentonCountyMasterGardener

Save the Date



Nov. 6 Greener Horizons Master Class Series

Nov. 12 General Meeting & Program Grow Native: Planting for Wildlife and Community

Contact Information

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Hulcher Services Building
611 Kimberly Drive
Bldg. B
Denton TX 76201-9026

Office: 940.349.2883

Help Desk:
940.349.2892
master.gardener@dentoncounty.gov

Webmaster:
dcmga.webmaster@gmail.com

Communications:
dcmga.communications@gmail.com

Website:
https://dcmga.com

Content

The submission deadline for the December edition of *The Root* is November 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 doctorhulld@gmail.com .

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