

Garden Wise Gazette

Texas AgriLife Extension Service — Collin County

Lessons and Beauty Nearby: CCRS EarthKind Rose Display

There are many public places in Collin County and nearby areas that offer outstanding lessons for gardening within our region. We are continuing our profiles of different garden sites in the region, and **this time we're looking at a garden that is both beautiful and public-oriented: The Collin County Rose Society's Earth Kind Rose Display at Davis Library in Plano.**



See How Beautiful Hardy Can Be
By Katherine Ponder

Just off of busy Independence Street in Plano sits a nice public library fronted by a ring of roses. It's the perfect spot for the CCRS to showcase roses to the general public. And it's also a perfect example of less is more, with just three varieties of plants.



(Continued on page 2)

Volume 2, Issue 3

In this issue:

Places of Interest	1
Cuttings	1
Pest & Disease Alerts	2
Earth Kind Fall Tips	3
Fall Vegetables	4
Bed Preparation	5
Lemon Balm	6
Book Review	7

FALL 2009

Special points of interest:

- * You can save favorite annuals by taking cuttings now.
- * Public rose garden at Davis Library displays hardy roses.
- * Vegetable gardening will yield onion, lettuce, broccoli and more.
- * Lemon Balm is an herb worth knowing and growing.

Save a plant: Cuttings

By Beth Mortenson

Autumn has finally arrived and the weather is cooling. The area gardens are looking green and lush, recently refreshed from the hardship of the heat of the summer. Annuals and perennials are

putting on their grand show of growth and color which is specially saved for their last performance of the year.

I love this time of year, and yet I cannot help feel that ever-so slight pang of anxiety



(Continued on page 3)

Pest & Disease
alert

Chilli Thrips: They're here and hungry for your plants. Tiny insects, less than a sixteenth of an inch long, are known to attack at least 40 plant families including many landscape plants. For information, see <http://chillithrips.tamu.edu/>

Oak
Wilt:
The
Texas



Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory has been busy this year processing Oak Wilt samples. As of January, 60 samples were submitted resulting in 12 Live Oaks, 1 Water Oak, and 1 Shumard Red Oak diagnosed positive for the causal fungus *Ceratostoma fagacearum*. More information at <http://texasoakwilt.org>

Take all Patch: The fungus, *Gaumannomyces* sp, commonly called "take-all patch" on St. Augustine, and "bermudagrass decline" on bermudagrass. The symptoms of this disease are typically yellowish thinned out large irregular patches. Closer inspection of the grass may show discolored stolons (runners) and a poor root system (black, short and dry rotted). More info at: http://agrillifebookstore.org/publications_details.cfm?whichpublication=750

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CCRS Rose Display Garden (Continued from page 1)

CCRS members, under the inspiration of member Lynn Martin, began work on the display garden in 2005. They amended the soil, tilled, dug, planted, and mulched until there was a little garden of EarthKind roses. These included an inner group of Knock Out roses (single-petaled red), a second circle of Belinda's Dream (double-petaled pink), and an outermost circle of Marie Daly (small, semi-double-petaled pink).

The roses were selected because they are truly hardy. EarthKind roses can thrive without spraying of fungicide or pesticides, with little water, and even under extremely hot conditions. As if to test this theory, the city of Plano cut water to the garden for an entire year during a drought. The roses didn't mind at all. They kept right on blooming and doing their thing!

Even in late September, all of the roses were blooming prolifically. The Belinda's Dream plants, which now stands about 5' tall, were lacing the air all around the library with their sweet smell. The Marie Daly plants, which are about 4.5' tall, offer even more fragrance. The Knock Outs are not prized for their scent, but what a show they still were putting on with nearly 6' height.

Library patrons share the space with other Plano offices, including police officers and building inspectors. Everyone passes right next to the rose garden and gets a treat for the senses. If you drop in the library, helpful staff at the information desk will give you an information sheet about the rose garden and EarthKind roses in general. It's worth a visit, and you can catch up on a little reading, too!

If you want to see and learn about roses in person, the Collin County Rose Society is hosting its second annual [Rose Dango](#) on Oct. 17-18.

For more information about Earth Kind Roses and why NOW is a good time to put them in your garden, visit <http://agnews.tamu.edu/showstory.php?id=1413> E



Belinda's Dream



Knock Out and Belinda's Dream roses



Marie Daly roses and Knock Outs



cuttings (Continued from page 1) that winter will come too fast and that I will lose my favorite annual and tender perennial plants to the frost. I find myself trying to decide which of the plants will win the few coveted spots that I have set aside in my garage for overwintering. There are always too many plants and never enough space.

Each year I have had to comfort myself by remembering that next year I can buy more of my favorite plants. This comfort is limited, however, because I know that I will not find the exact same plant with the exact same characteristics as I had grown to love and appreciate over the season.

But there is good news! I now know how easy it is to use stem cuttings to propagate clones of my favorite plants. It is a simple procedure that will take only a small space in my home. The care that I will provide the cuttings over the winter will be minimal and I will be rewarded come spring with a plant that is ready to take the place of its parent, and the color, variegation, and proliferation of blooms on the offspring plant will be identical to its parent.

Here are the simple steps to propagate your favorite plants:

1. Prepare a soilless planting medium. This can be bought pre-packaged in a garden center but it is easy to make your own. Use one part sand to one part vermiculite, or use one part perlite to one part vermiculite, and mix well. Place the medium in new containers or you can use old ones that have been sterilized with a mild bleach solution.
2. Take your cuttings from the mother plant well before the first frost. Look for healthy plant tissue that is neither too soft nor too hard, oftentimes found in the middle of an outer stem that has experienced recent growth.
3. Trim the cutting by removing the top soft growth. Cut the bottom of the cutting at a slant just below a node. Trim all but two upper leaves on the cutting. If the leaves are very large, cut the leaves in half.
4. Dip the cutting in a root hormone. This product can be found in any garden center. Fully submerge the bottom node with hormone and shake off any excess.
5. Using a dibble, or a pencil, make a hole in the

planting medium. This will allow you to place the prepared cutting in the medium without rubbing off the hormone. Gently press the medium around the cutting.



6. Water the newly planted cutting from the bottom by setting it in a shallow pan of water. When the medium is fully saturated, remove the pot and let it drain.
7. Cover the pots with a clear container to retain the humidity. Soda bottles with the bottoms cut out work very well. Placing the pots in a plastic bag will also work if the bag is propped so as to not touch the plant material. Place the pots in a bright area, away from drafts and direct sun.
8. After 6 to 8 weeks, gently tug on the cuttings. If there is some resistance, roots have likely formed. If the roots have formed, replant the cutting in your favorite compost-based potting soil and give it a bright windowsill to prepare for spring.
9. Plant your new creations outside after the threat of frost has passed.

There are many plants that respond very well to this particular propagation method. Some of the annuals and tender perennial that we may find in our local gardens include coleus, geraniums, phlox, salvias, hibiscus, periwinkles, purslane, verbenas, daisies, and snapdragons. 0



Earth Kind Fall Tips

Fall is an excellent time to establish new plants in the landscape. Cooler temperatures and occasional rainfall create ideal growth conditions for a variety of trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials. The Earth-Kind Plant Selector is an excellent tool for identifying highly adapted plants for specific gardening areas throughout the state.

This searchable database provides information on over 1,000 commonly used landscape plants. Those with an Earth-Kind Index value of 8 or above will significantly contribute towards creating a healthy and sustainable landscape. Visit the Earth Kind web site at <http://earthkind.tamu.edu/> for more information.

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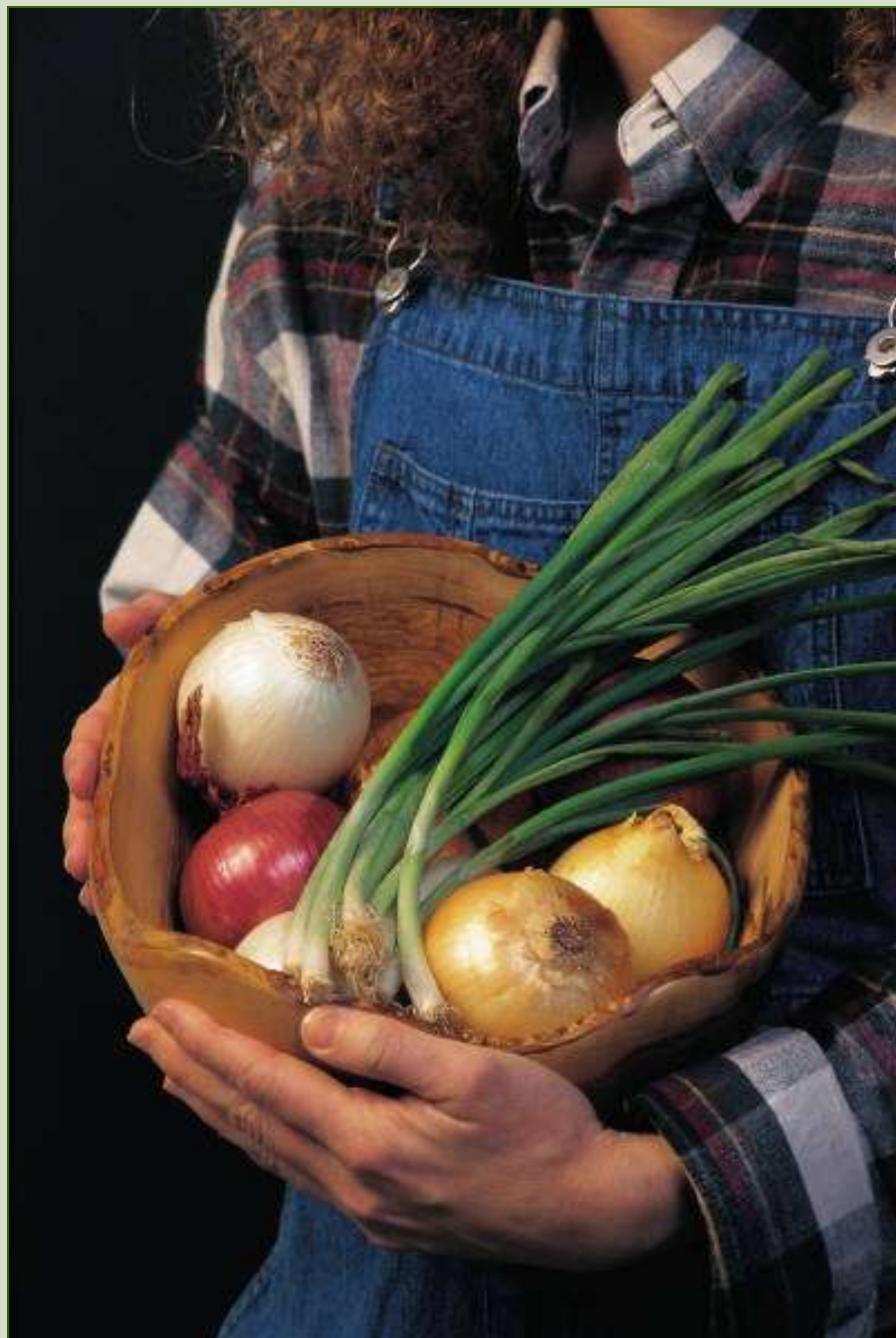
Fall Vegetable gardening 2

By Tamara Galbraith

Ah, autumn in North Texas. Is there a more beautiful time of year, weather-wise? After the mosquitoes and triple digit temperatures finally take their leave, gardeners happily return to the sanctity of **the outdoors...** with a long to-do list in hand. In October, two words are applicable: **direct seeding.** That's right, your days of starting transplants in the garage are over (until January, anyway). Let's talk about the root crops first. These include beets, carrots, radishes and turnips. The only real preparatory work necessary is ensuring the soil is relatively loose and very well-draining. Work lots of compost deeply into the soil of your beds and you **can't go wrong.** If you're planning on growing beets, soak the seeds overnight to soften the hard outer coating. Other than that, all you need to do is just scatter root crop seeds in foot-wide bands, then cover with an inch of sifted compost, press down firmly, and water well.

Once the seeds start sprouting, you will need to **thin them out a little.** Don't pull the extra sprouts out – that can damage the roots of the ones you want to save. Instead, use scissors to snip the unwanted plants down right at soil level. Most root crops do well with about three inches around each plant; carrots can be a little more crowded than that. Radishes grow incredibly fast, so make successive plantings throughout the winter if you like. Beets and turnips will be mature around December 1. Carrots can be left in the ground right through the winter, but **they'll probably be ready sometime in January** if you planted around October 1.

Next we have our onion-type crops. Garlic should always be grown from a clove or bulblet. Simply stick each clove in the ground with the pointy end up, about two inches deep in the soil and spaced six



inches apart. Then just leave them until spring. Around March 1, you should have a beautifully developed bulb for every clove you planted. Onions and leeks can be direct-sown from seed. Give them a little more space and again, plan on leaving them in the ground until at least **February; they'll be fine with a light layer of straw or mulch** through the winter.

Finally, the joys of growing leafy greens will be nearly uncontainable during October. The cooler, moister climate is just perfect for the makings of a gorgeous salad. However, like beets, seeds of spinach, mustard and chard should be soaked overnight before you toss them in your beds. Lettuce is the big favorite this time

(Continued on page 5)

Bed Preparation in Clay Soils

By Steve George

- Construct a raised bed that is 4 inches above grade at its edges, 6-7 inches above grade in the center (this is called crowning the bed).
- The importance of raising the bed in clay soils is that it provides a place to which the excess water can drain and thus get out of the root zone. End result is a root zone area that is much better aerated.
- Within this raised bed, add:
 - * 3 inches of fully composted organic matter (e.g. compost, well-rotted horse manure, leaf mold). Apply each time that the soil is worked.
 - * 3 inches of expanded shale. One-time application only.
- Incorporate both of these materials to a depth of 8-10 inches.
- Notes:

NEVER add sand to a clay. Sand and clay make concrete!

*Gypsum is NOT effective in opening up our heavy clay soils. Use expanded shale instead. E

Vegetable Gardening (Continued from page 4)

of year. **But don't** waste your time with bland iceberg types—go for leaf, romaine and butter-head varieties instead. Sprinkle the seed on top of the soil, press in, and water well. Do not cover lettuce seeds with a heavy layer of soil—they need light to germinate. Keep the seeds well watered, **but don't** worry too much about crowding. Lettuce is very forgiving. For this reason, it does pretty well in containers. With many varieties, lettuce is also the veggie that keeps on giving: clip off leaves, or even the entire bunch, and it will grow back to give you another delicious harvest.

So, vegetable growers, rejoice in the beauty of fall. Yes, **it's a busy time of year** in all aspects of gardening, **but don't** deny yourself the opportunity to grow a wide variety of delicious, fun and easy veggies. M

To read part 1 of this series, see pages 5 and 6 of our [previous issue](#).



Lemon Balm—Herb of the Year 2007

By Mary Nell Jackson

Heads turned when lemon balm was announced as Herb of the Year 2007. At first glance to those that are not familiar with the powerful properties of this sometimes droopy plant, this was a poor choice. Some gardeners even consider it a very invasive weed. To those of us that know Lemon Balm and use it, we nodded our heads in congratulations.

Melissa officinalis is in the mint family, Lamiaceae. You will feel the square stem upon closer inspection. It is a perennial that grows 2-3 feet tall and about 2 feet wide. **The plant's leaves are largest at the base and grow smaller towards the top. Each leaf is covered with stiff hairs on the upper surface. Lemon Balm's flowers are pale yellow to white and may become pale blue as they mature. The season may last from May to October depending on the weather, and Lemon Balm is hardy in zone 7.**

Cultivation

The good news is that Lemon Balm is probably one of the easiest herbs to grow and is ideal for beginners. Some gardeners consider it a weed because this perennial grows and spreads so rapidly. One misconception is that Lemon Balm spreads like mint. While mint spreads by underground runners, Lemon Balm spreads via seeds. The easy solution is to watch for the seeds to appear and snip them off before the wind does some rearranging of your plant placement. Most herbalists feel Lemon Balm is an essential **herb in your garden. Don't fret over this hardy herb. It is very adaptable.**

Propagation

There are many ways to propagate Lemon Balm. Most herbal experts find



that the species' easy self-seeding makes planned propagation unnecessary. If you want to plant the seeds, remember that it germinates within 5-9 days when uncovered or covered lightly with vermiculite. If you plan to propagate in the spring, take a 3-4 inch softwood tip cutting, remove 2/3 of the leaves, and pinch out the growing tip to prevent wilting. Dip the cuttings in rooting hormone powder and place in sterile medium amended with coarse sterile sand to provide support and moisture. The cutting should be watered immediately and kept out of direct sun to root in 3-4 weeks. You can also dig up a clump (when dormant), and then replant.

Lemon Balm can be grown in full sun or partial shade. Good drainage is important for any healthy plant, so add some mulch to your balm to give it more protection in our hot weather. Lemon balm does not often attract pests or have diseases, but the few that get through can be treated with beneficial insects, insecticidal soaps, traps and manual removal. This is a plant that you will ingest so do not use pesticides.

Pruning and Harvest

Leaves can be harvested as needed; thinning may help air circulation, a good idea during our humid summers. It is usually best to remove only 1/2 of the stalk until

you test the health of your plants. Some herbalists harvest 3 times a season and cut the plants nearly to ground level—spring, summer & fall. This plant will survive and flourish with this method.

Drying

If you choose to dry your harvest to use in teas and culinary recipes, this method will allow you to use the herb year around. You can strip off the leaves, hang bunches to dry, or place your harvest in large baskets out of the sunlight. Drying usually takes less than a week. Dried leaves can be stored for a year in a glass container in a dark, dry place. I prefer using my Lemon Balm fresh as long as I have plants in the garden.

Culinary

Lemon Balm is a versatile culinary herb. You may want to use it to flavor your beverages, appetizers, main courses and desserts. It can be added to salads, sandwiches, soups, stews, butters, cheeses, fish, eggs dishes, vegetables, fruit cups, jams & jellies, honey, sauces, marinades, dressings, herb vinegars, wine, punch, cakes, custards, tarts, sorbets, ice cream, cookies, crepes, pies and cheesecakes, or used in stuffing for poultry, pork and veal.

The most popular way to use Lemon Balm is in tea. Leaves can be combined with Earl Gray, green or black tea and a handful can be added to a pitcher of iced tea.

I hope the “Doubting Thomas” group will take a closer look at this wonderful herb. Sometimes the old saying, “You can't tell a book by its cover” can even apply to our plant material. C

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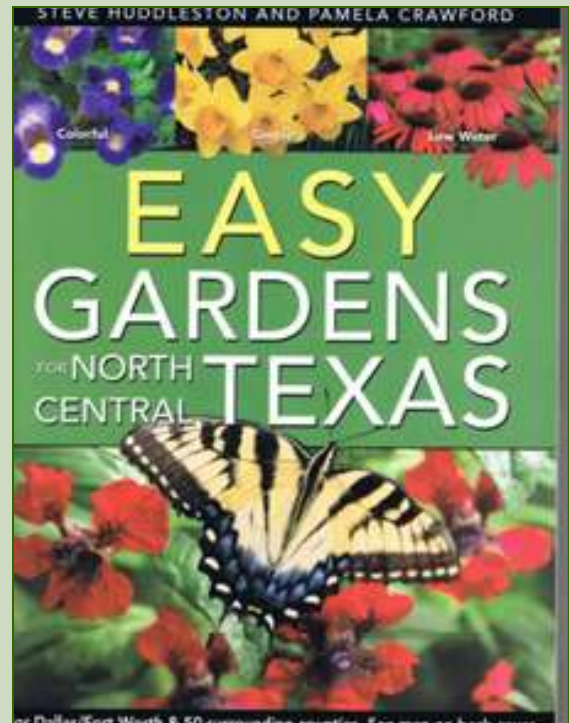
EASY GARDENS FOR NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS

By: Steve Huddleston &
Pamela Crawford

Reviewed by: Fran
Goldman

After reading that Steve Huddleston would be a guest speaker at the Collin County Master Gardener general meeting on May 28, 2009, I wrote the date in red on my calendar. Steve is the senior horticulturalist at the Ft. Worth Botanic Garden, a frequent tourist destination for many of my out of town visitors. The gardens are always full of beautiful surprises in every season of the year. Now he has co-authored a book that both amateur and experienced North Texas gardeners can read and incorporate into producing a successful home garden.

Because of the difficult soil and extreme weather conditions present in North Texas, successful results can be quite challenging to even the most experienced gardener. *Easy Gardens For North Central Texas* helps solve many of the problems we all encounter by offering suggestions and solutions to many gardening dilemmas. The illustrations and photos are very striking, and the information is easy to understand. Each plant is clearly described on double page exhibits, and various symbols are shown at the top of the pages to quickly describe its characteristics. A climate map and helpful tips for planting in our area are clearly headlined.



It is such a help to turn the pages and see blue ribbons highlighting the easiest plants to include in your garden. Red ribbon plants require a bit more care, but are also dependable choices. The book also divides annuals, perennials, shrubs, vines and trees. Mr.

Huddleston's personal tips to the gardener are interspersed throughout the chapters. He reminds us to consider the environment, irrigation and pairing plants for optimum beauty and success in the garden.

Not only is *Easy Gardens For North Central Texas* informative, it is also a delightful collection of photos and gardening how-to's to add to any library. The bonus is that I now own a personally signed copy of the book to browse through whenever I have a question about my own little backyard paradise!

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