Home Grown Newsletter
February 2021

Interested in Planting A Pollinator Garden?

Paul Winski, Harris County Extension Agent, Horticulture

Pollinator gardens are a great addition to any landscape and can add a dynamic feature by inviting a diverse pollinator population.

Key steps to a successful pollinator garden:

- Different flowers attract different pollinators: shape, size, color, arrangement, and fragrance all play a role in attracting pollinators.
- 80% of all plant species are pollinated by insects that feed on nectar - a carbohydrate source and pollen - a protein source.
- Choose a sunny location with at least 6 hours of sunlight.
- Plan on including native plants to increase plant diversity.
- Plant a few larval host plants needed for butterflies and moths to complete their life cycle.
- Reduce pesticide use, even organic pesticides can negatively affect pollinators.
- Provide blooms throughout the growing season; overlap bloom times to ensure there is always food available.

Some annual and perennial pollinator plants for your garden.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Plant Type
Pentas	*Pentas lanceolata*	Annual
Sunflower	*Helianthus annus*	Annual
Zinnia	*Zinnia elegans*	Annual
Purple Coneflower	*Echinacea purpurea*	Perennial
Black-eyed Susan	*Rudbeckia sp*	Perennial
Butterfly Milkweed	*Asclepias tuberosa*	Perennial
Gaura	Gaura lindheimeri	Perennial
Mexian Bush Sage	*Salvia leucantha*	Perennial
Copper Canyon Daisy	*Tagetes lemonii*	Perennial
White Mist Flower	*Eupatorium havanense*	Perennial
Turk's Cap	*Malvaviscus arboreus*	Perennial

Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a larval host plant for the monarch butterfly.

The Importance of Soil Testing

Shannon Dietz, Harris County Extension Agent, ANR

Soil testing is a quick and accurate method to determine the relative acidity of the soil (pH) and the level of several essential nutrients (phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sodium, sulfur, manganese, copper, and zinc) needed for proper plant growth. The test results will help aid in the selection of plants, soil prep, and fertilization. Most importantly, it will help you in avoiding OVER FERTILIZATION which can stimulate excessive plant growth and the likelihood of disease. When these excess nutrients are applied and not used by plants, they generally runoff in surface waters during storms or leach into groundwater. By applying the correct grade and amount of fertilizer, you can avoid unnecessary pruning and have healthier, more productive plants.

Understanding soil-test report terms - Each soil sample is classified according to humic (organic) matter content. The classes are:

Min - Mineral Soil, a low percentage of humic matter, target pH is 6.0.

M-O - Mineral-organic soil, medium percentage of humic matter, target pH 6.0.

ORG - Organic Soil, high humic matter content, target pH 5.0.

pH - soil pH is the measure of the active acidity (hydrogen (H)) in the soil solution.

Ca and Mg % - both calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg) are shown as percentages of CEC (cation exchange capacity). Soil calcium is seldom low enough to limit plant growth as it is the most common cation in the soil.

Soil samples may be taken at any time of the year, but never after amendments have been added to the soil. If you take soil samples for the same area in the following years, try to perform the tests at the same time of the year for the most accurate analysis.

The soil report will always make a recommendation for the NEXT growing season, so the test should be performed several months before planting or fertilizing. For a cool-season lawn, submit samples the previous summer and for a warm-season lawn, submit samples in the fall or winter. For a Spring vegetable garden or flower bed, submit your samples in the fall or winter.

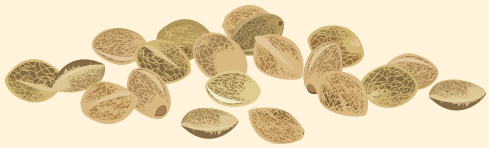
The accuracy of the soil test analysis depends on the quality of the soil sample. Always scrape leaves, mulch, and other debris from the soil surface before collecting the sample. For established lawns, samples should be from a depth of 4 inches, vegetable gardens and flower beds 6 to 8 inches, trees, and shrubs need a depth of around 6 to inches.

For more information on conducting your own soil test, you can refer to the website http://soiltesting.tamu.edu or http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/files/soilwebform.pdf. If you have any further questions, you are welcome to email me at Shannon.dietz@ag.tamu.edu.

How to take an accurate soil sample Job Aid.

Seeds vs. Transplants

Brandi Keller, Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

When the time comes for planting, we have a few decisions to make that will impact the care required and how quickly plants will mature. One question that many new vegetable gardeners ask is what to grow from seed and what to grow or purchase as a transplant. This can be a tricky question because there are many variables. On one hand, plants have their own preferences and some simply do not like their roots disturbed. On the other hand, we have our preferences and that may be to start with bigger plants so that they mature more quickly, providing a longer production period.

Many vegetables can be easily grown from seed, like lettuce, beans, carrots, cucumbers, and more. Growing from seed will provide you with a greater selection of varieties. Thinning seedlings is particularly important with small seeds so that space is provided for each plant to grow. Here is our Harris County Vegetable Planting Chart. Unless otherwise noted, planting times are for seeds, so check out what else can be grown!

If choosing transplants, you can grow your own or purchase them. Check the resources below for instructions on how to grow from home. If purchasing, look for healthy, sturdy plants. Tomato, pepper, and broccoli are a few that do well if transplanted to the garden.

Table 4. Ease of transplanting.

Easily transplanted		
Beet	Cauliflower	Onion
Broccoli	Chard	Tomato
Cabbage	Lettuce	
Require care		
Carrot	Eggplant	Pepper
Celery	Okra	Spinach
Very difficult without using containers		
Bean	Cucumber	Turnip
Cantaloupe	Pea	Watermelon
Sweet corn	Squash	

Source: Texas Home Vegetable Gardening Guide

When To Plant/Transplant

Cool season crops can be seeded by the end of February. If plants are purchased, then aim for the same timeframe. The longer they are in the ground, the more productive they'll be before the heat arrives. *Warm season crops* should be planted after any danger of frost or freeze has passed.

Garden Resources

How to Plant a Garden
Texas Home Vegetable Gardening Guide
Vegetable Varieties for Harris County

Texas Speaks Survey

We want to hear what you have to say

WHAT IS TEXAS SPEAKS?

TexasSpeaks is a state-wide online survey conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service with the purpose of listening to Texas citizens as they identify the strengths and needs of their communities.

Data from the survey will be aggregated at local levels and provided to local stakeholders. Additionally, statewide data will be aggregated and made available to state agencies and decision makers.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

To engage as many Texas citizens as possible to create the most accurate and helpful data to support Texas communities at both the state and local levels.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE SURVEY

- Online
- Open to the public
- Anonymous
- Takes 10 minutes
- Includes an opportunity to collect open-ended feedback

PARTICIPATE TODAY!
http://tx.ag/texasspeaks

Contact
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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

track the progress >> TEXASSPEAKS.TAMU.EDU

HomeGrown Lecture Series

Join us every other Thursday
at 10:00 a.m. CST

JANUARY
FEBRUARY **2021**
MARCH

01/07 **Pollinator Gardens**
Paul Winski - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

01/21 **Soil Testing**
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

02/04 **Spring Garden Prep**
Brandi Keller - Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

02/18 **Spring Vegetable Gardening**
Paul Winski - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

03/04 **History of Cattle in Texas**
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

03/18 **All About Basil**
Brandi Keller - Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

TO REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT, PLEASE VISIT
HTTPS://HOMEGROWN2021Q1.EVENTBRITE.COM/

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Contacts/Social Media/Websites

CONTACTS

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Social Media/Websites

Harris County Horticulture Facebook

Horticulture YouTube Channel

Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook

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