



Introduction

I miss summer already. But winter does have its benefits. Cold winters kill off insect pests and peaches accumulate chill hours from it. At least that's why I tell myself I should be grateful for the weather as I walk outside. Horticulture may slow in the winter, but it doesn't stop. See in our newsletter information about soil tests, seed tests, upcoming program announcements and more. If you have any plant related question, please feel free to contact me at the Extension Office at 830-997-3452. Thanks for reading!

Office Closures

We will be closed on 12/24-25/2018, 12/31/2018, 1/1/2019, 1/21/2019 & 2/18/2019.

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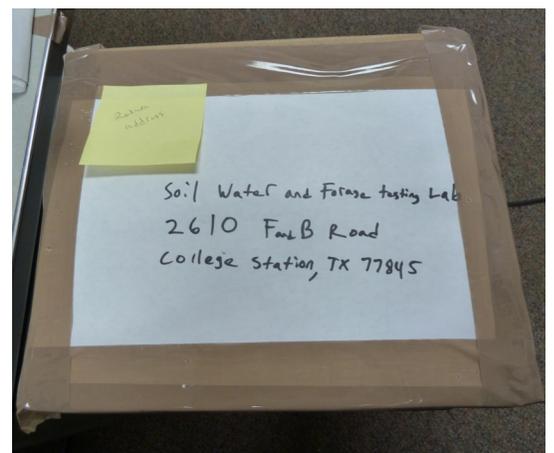
Short Guide to Soil Tests

Go to any extension program and you will always hear the recommendation “get a soil test”. There is a reason for that saying. Soil tests are great for helping to determine what nutrients your lawn, landscape, orchard or garden need. Taking a soil test is simple. If testing a lawn, home garden, or landscape, use the urban soil form. Take 8-10 six inch deep soil samples. The best sample is taken when you dig a small hole, and then dig a 6 inch slice off the side. If testing an orchard or field, take a composite sample every 10 to 40 acres. To get a composite sample, sample 10 to 15 times and get at least a 6 inch profile of soil. Take your soil samples and dump them into a plastic bucket. Mix and remove large rocks. Fill a quart bag or one of the special bags available at the extension office with soil. If you’ve got different soil types or noticed different nutrient deficiencies, considering sending off two samples instead of just one. Soil samples do not need to be bone dry, but if wet or moist air drying ahead of time is appreciated by the soil lab. Do not dry them in an oven.

Most people choose the basic soil test. This test will tell you pH, nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sodium, sulfur and EC conductivity levels in your soil. If you’ve been having nutrient deficiencies or unusual yellowing patterns, try a test with micronutrients in it. It’s more expensive, but it may pinpoint a particular nutrient deficiency in your soil.

Soil is not tested at the extension office. It needs to be mailed off to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Soil, Water & Forage Testing Laboratory or a different soil lab of your choice. The Texas A&M lab is usually the cheapest. If looking for a different lab, try Texas Plant and Soil Lab or A&L Plains Ag Labs.

The Texas A&M Lab changes their forms every year, and will not accept the old forms. Check their website or call us for the 2019 form in January. Please call us at the extension office if you need any help reading your results. One soil test every three years is recommended.



2018 Gillespie County Pecan Show Results

On Nov. 30th the 2018 Gillespie County Pecan Show was held at the Gillespie County Extension office. There were 4 participants.

The judge was Olan Tisdale, who owns Fredericksburg Pecan Company, located at 711 East Main Street in Fredericksburg. Mr. Tisdale judged 13 entries with 10 different pecan varieties. Grand Champion entries were chosen in three divisions including Classic and New, Commercial and Natives.

Kermit Crenwelge won Grand Champion with his "Shoshoni" variety in the Classic and New division. Melissa Nedbalek received Grand Champion for her "Sioux" pecans in the Commercial division and for her native pecan entry in the Natives division.

Grand Champions, along with all other first place entries, will move on to the Central Texas Regional Pecan Show in Comanche on December 6th.

Below are the placings from the Gillespie County Pecan Show:

Classic and New:

Shoshoni-1st. Kermit Crenwelge

Commercial:

Cheyenne-1st. Melissa Nedbalek

Desirable-1st. Melissa Nedbalek

Hopi-2nd. Kermit Crenwelge

Kiowa-1st. Herb Nebgen. 2nd. Abbey Nedbalek

Mohawk-1st. Abbey Nedbalek

Sioux-1st. Melissa Nedbalek

Natives:

Lightest Pecan- 1st: Herb Nebgen

Natives- 1st. Melissa Nedbalek. 2nd. Abbey Nedbalek. 3rd. Kermit Crenwelge.



Display of the 2018 entries.

Gillespie County Chill Hour Tracker

Gillespie County AgriLife Extension will be tracking chill hours at the office this winter. Chill hours are a way to estimate if a fruit tree has received enough cold weather to set an adequate crop. Though many fruit crops need chill hours, this is a particular issue regarding peach trees. Chill hours will be reported using the under 45° F method and the 32-45° F method. Counting will start with the first frost. Please see <https://gillespie.agrilife.org/agriculture-2/horticulture/chill-hours/> for updates. If you wish to receive weekly updates for Gillespie County chill hours, please email me at elizabeth.mcmahon@agnet.tamu.edu to subscribe.

Are Those Seeds Any Good?

So you've been cleaning out the fridge in order to fit more holiday leftovers, and you've found some seed packets. Are these still good?

If stored properly, most seeds will last around three years. Check out the chart below for more details. If the seed is older or was stored in a hot place, you will want to do a germination test to find out if it's any good. Take a representative sample, ideally 100 seeds but you can go down to 20. Wrap the seed in a moist paper towel (pic 1), place it in a sealed plastic container and place someplace dark and warm. Check again in a week (pic 2). Then calculate the percent germination. For example, if I tested 20 cucumber seeds, and only 10 of them grew, then my seed has a 50% germination rate. This kind of germination test should work for most seeds, but a few need light or a cold period to germinate. If you know that your seed requires these conditions, try to simulate them for the germination test.

Vegetable	Average Years Viable	Vegetable	Average Years Viable
Asparagus	3-4	Lettuce	1-6
Beans	2-4	Okra	2-3
Beets	2-5	Melon	3-6
Broccoli	3-5	Peas	2-4
Brussels Sprouts	3-5	Peppers	2-5
Cabbage	3-5	Pumpkins	4-6
Chinese Cabbage	3-5	Radish	4-5
Carrots	3-4	Spinach	1-5
Cauliflower	4-5	Squash/Gourds	3-6
Collards	3-5	Swiss Chard	2-5
Corn	1-3	Tomato	3-7
Cucumber	3-6	Turnip	4-5
Eggplant	4-5	Watermelon	4-5
Fennel	3-4	Dill	1-4
Kale	3-5	Basil	3-5
Kohlrabi	3-5	Oregano	4
Lentil	1-2	Thyme	1-4

Chart adapted from Johnny's Seed. See here: <https://www.johnnysseeds.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-JSSSharedLibrary/default/dw913ac4d0/assets/Information/seed-storage-guide.pdf>



Strange Tales of Horticulture



Why Do Onions Make You Cry?



It's easy to understand why you might cry after cutting up jalapenos. If you rub your fingers with your eyes, you can transfer capsaicin, which causes tears. But with an onion, you don't need to even touch your eyes for the tears to start to flow.

The answer to why onions make you cry is a chemistry question. When you cut into the onion, you release a chemical called the lachrymatory-factor synthase. This enzyme reacts with other chemicals (amino acid sulfoxides) in the onion to form sulfenic acid. Sulfenic acid is unstable, and becomes syn-propanethial-s-oxide, which is a gassy chemical. This gas contacts your eyes, irritating them and producing tears.

To not weep as you slaughter poor defenseless onions, there are a few tricks you can try. Try refrigerating or freezing the onion for 30 minutes before cutting. This makes the combination of the chemicals slower, so you can finish cutting up the onion and get out of the kitchen. Or you can try cutting an onion underwater. This can be slippery and may wash away the flavor. Additional solutions are to cut up an onion in front of a fan or wear goggles.

Not all onions are as pungent. Sweet onion varieties, such as "1015", "Sweet Red" and others are less likely to make you cry. This is because these varieties make less of the tear inducing chemicals. These varieties are also easy to grow in your garden. If interested in learning more about growing your own onions, call me at the extension office or attend the "Grow it Cook It: Onions" program on January 18th. See below for more details.

Grow It Cook It Gardening and Cooking Program Series Coming in 2019

Learning how to grow something in your garden can be hard enough, but after it is produced, you may be left wondering "What do I do with this now?". The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office in Gillespie County can help you. We are pleased to announce a new three program series, "Grow it Cook it". This series is designed to help you learn not just how to grow a vegetable, but how to also prepare and cook it. Attendees can expect to learn about different vegetable varieties, how to grow the selected vegetable, preparation tips, and cooking methods. Recipe samples are part of the program. Don't waste that garden space for something you aren't even sure you will like!

Program dates and themes are as follows: The classic onion will be covered on January 18th, heat beating sweet potatoes on May 10th and the trendy versatile cauliflower on September 6th. Programs will be from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm at the Gillespie County Extension office, located at 95 Frederick Road in Fredericksburg. You can register for individual programs at \$15 each or register for all three programs for \$25. Payment can be made ahead of time or at the door. Refunds for missed programs will not be given and payments are non-transferable. Credit cards are not accepted. Programs will be taught by Family and Community Health Agent Shea Nebgen and Horticulture Agent Beth McMahon. Please contact the Gillespie County AgriLife Extension Office at 830-997-3452 to sign-up or with questions.

Caring for your Poinsettia

1. Choose a good poinsettia.



Look for:



Unopened



Opened



2. Water when dry.

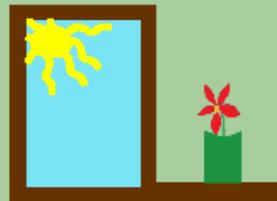


Remove the foil off the pot....



So it can drain freely.

3. Place in an sunny window.



4. Keep it safe from:



Pets



Warm Drafts



Cold Drafts

Created by Elizabeth McMahon, Gillespie County AgriLife Extension

Growing Asparagus at Home

Asparagus tastes better if grown at home. It likes alkaline soils, making it a vegetable worthy of growing in local gardens. Setting up an asparagus bed isn't simple, but once done it can produce a long time.

Set-Up

1. Locate a good spot with well-draining soil in full sun. Asparagus can get 4-5 ft. high, so place it north or west of your garden, where it won't shade anything out. Till in a 3 inch layer of compost or composted manure a couple months before planting. If your soil is shallow, plant in a raised bed.

2. Next, pick your variety. Asparagus can be male or female. Male varieties are usually more productive, vigorous and don't produce the annoying red berries. "Jersey Knight", "Jersey Supreme", and "Jersey Giant" are good mostly male varieties. "UC157" is another good choice. Avoid Washington varieties. Purple varieties are not as productive as the standard green. White asparagus isn't a separate variety, though some varieties are more suited for the blanching process than others.

3. Asparagus can be purchased as seed or as a crown. The seed will add an extra year before harvest. Look online or in local plant nurseries in January for crowns. Crowns are typically more expensive in local nurseries, so if purchasing many, look online. Purchase from a reputable company.

4. Crowns can be planted from January to February. Mark rows five feet apart. Dig a trench down the middle, 4 inches wide and 4 to 12 inches deep. Place the crowns 12 inches to 14 inches apart in the furrows. In loose soils, add 2 to 3 inches of soil with a little compost so that the crown is covered in the furrow. Firm it up. As the plant grows over the season, fill the furrow gradually. By the end of the first season, the furrow should be equal to the surrounding soil depth. Planting this deep allows you to be able to chop weeds in the rows without damaging the crowns. If you are liable to forget to fill the furrows, just plant at 4-12 inches deep (go deeper if your soil is looser) and immediately fill with soil, but do not compact the soil over the crown. Water weekly, but let the top inch of soil dry before watering again. Be aggressive in removing weeds.

5. It takes 2-3 years for an asparagus bed to come into production after planting. Don't harvest the 1st year, only a couple of stalks the 2nd year, and the 3rd year you can start some light harvesting.



Asparagus spears emerging in the late winter.

Tips on Managing an Established Asparagus Bed

- Every year, scatter 1 lbs. of 21-0-0 for every 20 feet, or as recommended by a soil test. Apply in late January or early February. After last harvest, apply an additional 1-2 lbs. per 20 feet of row of 21-0-0.
- Harvest spears when they are 4-10 inches long. It will probably be every other day when they are in season. You can use a knife or snap off by hand. Do not leave behind stubs. Stop harvesting or do not harvest if stem diameter is less than 3/8 inch, or if the head has opened up. Harvest usually lasts 4-6 weeks. Store spears in a cooler as soon as possible in a plastic bag that keeps moisture. This helps reduce future fibrous toughness.
- After the first frost and the fern tops dry out, burn the stems or cut off the tops at ground level and throw away.



Another successful burn at McMahon Ranch without the volunteer fire department visiting.

Plantastic Vegetable Gardening Seminar

New to the Texas Hill Country and want to start a vegetable garden? Come join the Gillespie County AgriLife Extension Service and Hill Country Master Gardeners for a Plantastic Vegetable Gardening Seminar on February 1st, 2019 at the Gillespie County Farm Bureau Center, 237 Equestrian Dr, Fredericksburg, TX.

Session topics include “Getting Good Soil in the Garden”, “Tomatoes”, “Caring for Your Garden After Planting”, “Preventing Diseases and Controlling Pests in Your Garden” and more. New this year are three hands-on breakout sessions. Topics include: “Seed Saving”, “Starting Plants from Seed” and “Creating Keyhole and Container Gardens”. Participants will choose two

breakout sessions and one hands-on session. Pre-register early to get the hands-on session of your choice. Door prizes will be drawn at the end of the program.

The program will start at 8:30 am with registration and end at 3:30 pm. There will be a 45 minute break for lunch. An optional box lunch is provided through Clear River Catering. Registration is strongly encouraged beforehand as spots in the hands-on sessions are limited due to supplies. Paid pre-registrations & lunch orders are due by January 30th. Cost for the program is \$35 with a box lunch, \$25 without a box lunch and \$40 at the door with no boxed lunch. This program is not included in the Grow It Cook It program series.

Please contact the Gillespie County AgriLife Extension office at 830-997-3452 to register. Payment is due at registration but can be mailed into the office (Gillespie County AgriLife Extension, 95 Frederick Road, Fredericksburg, TX 78624). Credit cards are not accepted. Transferring your registration to someone else is allowed provided notice is given by January 30th.



Example of a Gillespie County Garden.

Sign-Up Open for the Hill Country Master Gardeners

If you enjoy volunteering and working with plants, consider signing up for the 2019 Hill Country Master Gardener Training Class. Class topics include composting, soils, propagation, insects, landscaping principles and much more. Classes are on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 am -3:00

pm, February 26th, 2019 to April 18th, 2019. Classes will be primarily in Kerrville at the Hill District Youth Event Center, with the occasional fieldtrip to Fredericksburg and surrounding areas.

As a part of this class and in becoming a Master Gardener, participants must fulfill an initial 50 hours of service and a minimum of 50 class hours. After becoming a Master Gardener, recertification requirements are 6 hours continuing educational programs and 25 hours volunteer service on recognized projects.

If interested, please contact me for a draft schedule. Please see the application here: <https://www.hillcountrymastergardeners.org/become-a-master-gardener/> Applications are accepted until February 19th, 2019 for the 2019 course.



Donna Bellis and Lydia Jones at the Special Opportunity Garden.



Kim Courtright, Raeann Reid and Linda Proffitt at the Hill Country Memorial Health Fair in Fredericksburg.



Upcoming Programs In & Near Gillespie County



Last Chance CEU Class

December 27th, 2018. Gillespie County Extension Office, 95 Frederick Road, Fredericksburg. Topics to be announced. 2 CEUs given, 1 IPM & 1 General. Last chance to get private pesticide applicator CEUS for the year.

Gillespie County Stockshow

January 11-12th, 2019. Gillespie County Fairgrounds, Fredericksburg. Come watch the kids exhibit their livestock show projects. Free. Auction on January 12th, 2019.



Statewide Programs



Earthkind Landscape Shortcourse

December 17th-19th, 2018. College Station, TX. Covers new landscape problems, landscape pests, disease & pest ID and IPM. Intended for landscape managers. 18 Pesticide applicator CEUS, 6.5 ISA CEUS, 16 TNLA CEUS. Cost is \$355. Register online at agriliferegister.tamu.edu/organizationListings/30.

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Annual Conference

January 25th-26th, 2019. Little Rock, Arkansas. Learn how to farm sustainably. Various programs cover cut-flowers, soil management, farm budgeting and selling, livestock, vegetables & more. Pre-conference tours, short courses & workshops available. Cost is \$190 until Dec. 22nd, \$220-250 afterward. Register online here: <https://www.ssawg.org/registration>

Grow It Cook It: Onions

January 18th, 2019. Gillespie County AgriLife Extension Office, 95 Frederick Road, Fredericksburg. Learn about which varieties of onions to plant, how to plant them, harvesting, preparation and cooking tips. Cost is \$15 per class, \$25 for the series.

Plantastic Vegetable Gardening Seminar

February 1st, 2019. Gillespie County Farm Bureau Center, 237 Equestrian Dr, Fredericksburg, TX. Five hour program with general, breakout and hands-on sessions. Topics Register early to get your choice of hands-on session and to order your lunch. Cost is \$35 with box lunch, \$25 without box lunch, and \$40 at the door (no box lunch included)

Texas Pecan Short Course

January 28th-31, 2019. A&M Horticulture Department HortTREC facility, Somerville, TX. Learn everything you need to know about growing pecans, from orchard set-up to selling. Grafting information included. Four meals provided. Cost is \$250. Register by January 25th at <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/>

Texas Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association Annual Conference

February 14th-16th, 2019. Corpus Christi. Keynote speaker is Ellen Polishuk. Add-ons include workshops, fieldtrips and locally sourced banquet. Cost for non-members is \$300, \$250 for members. One day passes available. Register online here: <http://www.tofga.org/page-1863580>

Name that Plant!



What is the name of this plant? First person to respond with the correct answer will get their name featured in next quarter's newsletter. Picture by Dotty Woodson.

Last Newsletter's Plant



Answer from last quarter's newsletter was Basil 'Cardinal'. First person to name the plant correctly was Raeann Reid.

This newsletter is a publication comes out quarterly, with issues out on February/March (spring), June/July (summer), September/October (fall), November/December (winter). If you would like to stop receiving this newsletter, please contact us me at elizabeth.mcmahon@agnet.tamu.edu.

For other questions, comments, and concerns, please contact us at:

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