

News From Your County Agent
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Last week was a definite roller coaster in terms of weather around our area. We had a nice spring like week with a high on Thursday of 82 and then by the end of the week we were back into a winter mode with sleet in the La Pryor area and temperatures barely reaching the mid 50's on Friday and a cold Saturday as well. Of course many folks are starting to get fields ready for spring planting which is a good sign spring is just around the corner. Greetings to all of you and may all of you have a very happy and joyful Valentine's Day.

Texas A&M AgriLife Develops Nationwide Spinach Promotion Release The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service pass to the plate program has developed a nationwide spinach marketing piece which I would like to share with you this week:

Spinach, best grown in mild climates with an abundance of fertile, high quality soil and water, put Crystal City, Texas on the map in 1917. This southwest area of Texas is best known as the Wintergarden region and is recognized by farmers for its long growing seasons. From 1930-1950, the Wintergarden region experienced a "spinach boom," making Texas the top spinach producing state in the US. Over time, consumer demands influenced production in Texas, leading to varieties such as "baby" and "teen" flat-leaf spinach, according to Larry Stein, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Horticulturist and Marcel Valdez County Extension agent in Zavala County. From 2006-2016, Texas experienced a 29% increase in spinach production, jumping from 32,025 tons of spinach produced to 41,215. Ed Ritchie, III owner of Tiro Tres Farms is one of the leaders in the industry as a well know grower and shipper of high-quality spinach grown in Zavala and Uvalde Counties.

Other than being a popular commodity in Texas, spinach has many nutritional benefits, including its high vitamin and mineral counts, caloric density, and its contributions to heart health. Nutritional facts for 100g (or 3 1/3 cups) of spinach:

- 2.86g of protein
- 3.63g of carbs
- 0.39g of fat
- 28.1mg of Vitamin C
- 469µg of Vitamin A
- 482.9µg of Vitamin K
- 194µg of Folate

And for all that goodness, it's very low in calories - one cup of spinach equates to a total of 6 calories, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

While spinach is often served raw in salads, it can also be enjoyed in soups, pastas, and dips. AgriLife Extension's Dinner Tonight has developed a plethora of recipes to incorporate spinach into your meals as a main ingredient, including Chicken and Spinach Lasagna, Spinach Quiche, Black bean and Spinach Quesadillas, and Spinach Pasta Toss. To find more nutritious spinach recipes, visit dinnertontight.tamu.edu/<<https://dinnertontight.tamu.edu/>>. Videos are also being produced as part of this educational program on spinach.

Tip of the week: Valentine's Day Flowers-To Buy or Grow Your Own The international trade of cut flowers is a blooming industry, with an average annual growth of 6 percent and an estimated global trade volume of more than 100 billion a year. In the U.S. alone, more than 13 billion worth of cut flowers are sold annually, and the majority —a whopping 82 percent are imported. In the same way that fruit and vegetables are flown in to give you more than a few weeks of strawberries and rhubarb each year, the flower industry has transitioned from a traditional model based on local production to an international one that leverages warmer climates and significantly lower labor costs in southern countries.

Millions have been led down the garden path in believing that flowers we buy locally — at our neighborhood florist or corner grocery — come from the region. But chances are the flowers you give or receive this Valentine's Day have accumulated more air miles than diplomats. So where do your flowers grow? The U.S. imports mainly from Colombia, a nation that sells around 500 million tons of flowers for Valentine's Day. Americans get 78 percent of their imported flowers from Colombia, followed by Ecuador and Mexico at 15 percent and 2 percent respectively. Europe, on the other hand, imports most of its flowers from Africa, with Kenya in the lead, followed by Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia.

Bothered by the quantity of air miles these blooms rack up? Turns out the picture isn't as alarming as you'd think. Flower-producing countries enjoy humidity, temperature and soil fertility levels that are optimal for growth. Importing flowers actually saves huge amounts of energy by not having to light and heat greenhouses, especially in January and February, when global demand peaks just as northern temperatures plummet, just like the recent arctic vortex that hit the northern part of the United States a few days ago. So Ethiopian airfreight flowers might actually be greener than those grown in local glass houses.

If you really want to impress your significant other, you may want to grow your own for next valentine's day. In South Texas, plant roses in the fall or early winter. In other Texas growing regions, plant roses after the danger of frost has passed. Check out the Earth-Kind roses selected by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension for hardy choices adapted to Texas living with minimal environmental impact at <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkindroses/cultivars/> If using undecomposed organic matter, add a bit of nitrogen to the soil because the decomposition process will take nitrogen from the roses. REMEMBER Roses are dormant in the winter and bloom in the spring. The roses that are found in stores are grown in green houses, which means you will need a greenhouse or hot house to keep them blooming in time for valentine's day. But if you are like most people you will end up going to your local supermarket or flower shop and buying them for that special day. Have a great valentine's day week. M.V.

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