



# ECHO



## Texas AgriLife’s Community Horticultural Outreach

### Happy Trails

It’s been two years since I first started editing ECHO, and I’ve learned as much as I’ve edited. Not only have I met some really fun and fascinating people in a different way—through the written word—but also have gotten to “visit” events and places with our roving “reporters.” I’ve loved having that first read of all the articles that our members have sent in, and I’ve learned things like how to grow and harvest loofa gourds—that may come in handy!



ECHO has evolved over the past few years. As our organization embraced email immediacy through eMinders, ECHO has become more of an informational, read-at-your-leisure publication. The time-sensitive information gets funneled through email, and we newsletter writers and editors have the luxury of sharing more long-term, philosophical, and educational information. That approach has let us publish event wrap-up articles and photos; in-depth gardening and research instructions; gardeners’ journals; book reviews; plant spotlights; and garden travel accounts. Every one of our articles has provided information or association news in one way or another. We can also be proud that ECHO helps us be “green” because we distribute electronically.

You will soon see ECHOs coming from the thoroughly capable hands of Mary Ann Hicken. She has been doing the layout of this publication for the last year, is on the eMinders team, and is ready for the next communications challenge. And, while I figuratively pass the red pen to her, she and I will both tell you that all submissions are welcome. If you can talk, you can write and send in an article. Let your personality shine through your words and send in your stories. The red pen is used very lightly. Mary Ann is both a great newsletter editor but *and* a genuinely delightful person. You’ll love reading her work! I’ll continue working on our public newsletter—*GardenWise Gazette*—and will be an avid ECHO reader.

Happy Gardening,  
Katherine Ponder

### November-December 2009

Educational programs of Texas AgriLife Extension serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, gender, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.

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## Book review

By Mary Means

*Garden Ornament: Five Hundred Years of History and Practice* by George Plumptre

This book must have magnets in it because it kept jumping into my hands while I was cataloging all those books donated to CCMGA by Neil Sperry. I read it every chance I could get. The instant attraction of this book is the beautiful, lavish photographs. For no other reason, take a break on a cold winter day, go to the extension office, and treat yourself to an hour of browsing through this book.

*Garden Ornament* was copyrighted in London in 1989. It was published in paperback in New York in 1998. The book is a history of garden hardscape design, beginning in the 1500s. It emphasizes ornaments such as statues, furniture, containers, walkways, buildings, walls, and fountains. Most of the gardens described are on estates and castles in Great Britain and Europe. A few American gardens are mentioned, such as Longwood in Pennsylvania and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC. This is basically a coffee table book with glorious illustrations, and photographs by Hugh Palmer. Captions which accompany the illustrations are well prepared and interesting. Reading the text supplies further information about the garden being mentioned.

For a gardener who knows little about garden design, this is a great book. The illustrations will captivate the reader, and learning about them will create an awareness of garden design and its history. For example, there was a Minister of Finance in France who created a



beautiful estate garden. It was the envy of many people, one of whom was King Louis XIV. So envious was the king that he had the Finance Minister thrown into prison and left him there to die. Then Louis XIV hired the same landscape architect to create a garden for him. Louis XIV wanted his garden to be bigger and better and he wanted it to reflect the power of the King of France. Thus was created the gardens at Versailles.

A later chapter on the modern garden was written by Jamie Garnock. A chapter on available garden ornaments, collector's items, was written by James Rylands, a specialist in sales of garden sculpture and ornament for Sotheby's. *Garden Ornament* is a beautiful, appealing book and well worth spending the time reading it to earn that Continuing Education hour. 🌸

## Sow What?

Our fellow CCMGs who have completed vegetable specialist training are sharing the harvest of their knowledge. They compiled a list of veggies and varieties that they've successfully grown. You may need to order seed to grow some of these plants, and these are not necessarily TAMU recommended. Go to our website [www.ccmgatx.org](http://www.ccmgatx.org) for more information.

<b>Asparagus</b>		Superstar	
UC157	excellent, green, slow to fern	French Orange	super sweet, firm, produces June - October
Atlas	new, purple-tipped, slow to fern		
Purple Passion	mild flavor, purple, less productive		
<b>Beans</b>		<b>Carrots</b>	
Blue Lake	old standard, reliable, good flavor	Rainbow F1	mixed colors of very sweet slender carrots
Contender	vigorous, easy to pick, good flavor	Danvers Half Long	broad shoulders, very tasty, will oversummer without much damage
Nash	heat tolerant, good flavor	Sweet Treat	short, sweet
Festina	reliable, good flavor	Purple Dragon	dark purple skin, sweet orange inside
<b>Beets</b>		<b>Cauliflower/Broccoli</b>	
Detroit Dark Reddo	well early spring through summer, mulch well, greens are great when young	Violet Queen	purple intermediate type with cauliflower leaves and broccoli-like head, delicious, gorgeous, takes light frost
Lutz Green Leaf	good for greens		
Golden	tasty and beautiful, heirloom	<b>Corn</b>	
<b>Bok Choy</b>		Hickory King	white, open pollinated. For grits or tortilla flour, harvest in late summer when dry or harvest young for roasting ears.
Red Choi	good flavor when small, grows well in containers, red foliage	Mirai	short plant, excellent flavor but should be 65 day corn for here to avoid high temperatures and earworms
Joi Choi	fast maturing, heat tolerant		
<b>Cabbage</b>		<b>Cucumber</b>	
Savoy types	grows well here, slow to bolt in heat, tastes good, needs consistent BT applications for cabbageworm	Sweet Success	average length, needs lots of mulch
Mammoth Red Rock	large red cabbage, overwinters pretty well, heirloom	Sumpter	pickling size, stays sweet
		Dasher II	large size, good tasting slicer
<b>Cantaloupe</b>		<b>Eggplant</b>	
Ambrosia	very prolific, sweet 2 - 3 lb. melons, about 14 per plant	Dusky	late to produce so you can plant seedlings later in spring
Caravelle	produces a large amount of melons with great taste	Ichiban	long cylindrical type for slicer

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<b>Gretel</b>	ing 2009 AAS winner, lots of long, small, slender white fruits, medium sized plant, good in containers	<b>Fish</b>	sweet pepper, very prolific variegated foliage and fruit, gorgeous, ethnic heirloom, containers
<b>Garlic - Red Toch</b>	softneck, redstreaked, large bulbs, matures a bit earlier	<b>Fat and Sassy Tequila</b>	reliable, green to red beautiful lilac, productive
<b>Leek</b>		<b>Orange Sun</b>	sweet and beautiful
<b>Giant Musselburgh</b>	huge, overwinters well, heirloom	<b>Early Sunation Holy Mole</b>	large, green to yellow, sweet very prolific, hot pepper used to make traditional Mole sauce
<b>Lettuce</b>		<b>Hungarian Wax</b>	small but prolific plants with fairly hot fruit, heirloom
<b>Buttercrunch</b>	sweet, butter head	<b>jalapeno</b>	easy to grow, compact plant, does well in containers
<b>Green Ice</b>	consistent, loose-leaf	<b>jalapeno 'mucho nacho'</b>	plump red, not mild, but not real hot
<b>Prize Leaf</b>	red-tipped loose-leaf	<b>Mariachi hybrid</b>	spicy taste with mild heat, ripens in cream color and then turns red, 4" long, 2" wide, prolific, 65 days to harvest
<b>Little Caesar</b>	good flavor, romaine	<b>Mexibell</b>	hot, but looks like a bell pepper
<b>New Red Fire</b>	looks good, large heads, tastes great		
<b>Simpson Elite</b>		<b>Potatoes</b>	
<b>Okra</b>		<b>LaSoda</b>	good quality, red skinned
<b>Cajun Delight</b>	lower, produces more per linear foot of rows	<b>Kennebec</b>	large, white keeper
<b>Clemson Spineless</b>	2 or 3 plants per family are plenty, pick often	<b>Yukon Gold</b>	flavorful, yellow, small to medium
<b>Onions</b>		<b>Desiree</b>	Excellent, small, yellow, gourmet
<b>Yellow Granex Hybrid 33</b>	sweet mild flavor	<b>Caribe</b>	pretty, purple skinned, white
<b>White, Yellow or Red Granex</b>	consistent and sweet, flat	<b>Russian Banana</b>	easy to grow, versatile fingerling potato, disease resistant
<b>1015</b>	large, sweet, round, yellow	<b>Radish</b>	
<b>Bermuda</b>	old favorite, hard to find, flat, sweet	<b>Easter Egg</b>	mixed colors, tasty, easy to grow, matures quickly
<b>Peas</b>		<b>French Breakfast</b>	elongated red radish with white tip, mild flavor, easy to grow
<b>English Pea - Maestro</b>	sweet, moderately mildew resistant, raised bed only	<b>Nero Tondo</b>	Spanish black radish, gets quite large, very tasty and easy to grow
<b>Sugar Snap Pea</b>		<b>Squash</b>	
<b>Super Sugar Snap</b>	sweet, plump, productive, raised bed only	<b>Zebra Zuke</b>	delicious, striped, productive
<b>Sugar Ann</b>	good producer of fat, edible pod snap peas	<b>Sunray</b>	yellow, mild
<b>Peppers</b>		<b>Gentry</b>	yellow crookneck, apparently bred for the South
<b>Big Daddy</b>	light yellow, marconi-type	<b>Greyzini</b>	matures and produces extra early

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Zephyr	before vine borers take hold, great flavor a bi-colored 3-way hybrid of yellow crookneck, delicata and yellow acorn squash, delicious, prolific	heirloom
<b>Swiss Chard</b>		<b>Tomatoes - Small</b>
Bright Lights	very easy, withstands high heat without bitterness, cut-and-come-again growing habit, pretty	Juliet
Fordhook Giant	very large and very tasty, attractive landscape plant if grown in rich soil	Sweet Baby Girl
<b>Tomatoes - Large</b>		Sweet Gold
Early Girl	easy to grow, tasty, matures quickly	Porter
Celebrity	tasty, disease resistant, handles uneven moisture better than most so less cracking, firm, easy to slice	Sugary
Carnival	old favorite, large, flavorful	Yellow Pear
Carbon	dark fleshed, excellent flavor	<b>Turnips</b>
Paul Robeson	brick colored, complex flavor,	Purple Top

## Rooted in Past Update

The Rooted in the Past Committee has been busy helping historic sites stay true to their botanical pasts.

At the Young Cemetery, members prepped the soil and scattered seeds, hoping for a bevy of wildflowers next spring. These would be a nice addition to the bulbs that were planted at the historic Plano cemetery last year.

In Allen, we're working with organizers of the Allen Heritage Village, a small enclave of historic buildings clustered to show what Allen looked like 100 years ago, before highways and suburbs were even in the vocabulary. RIP members met with Heritage Village workers and designed landscaping for the site.

Watch us grow! 🌱



## Engineers: Smart irrigation controllers not so smart

Tests of “smart” irrigation controllers found most of the devices currently on the market were not as smart as hoped, said Texas AgriLife Extension Service irrigation experts.

The six devices tested, all currently on the market, applied from about one-third to two-and-a-half times more water than was recommended, according to Charles Swanson, AgriLife Extension associate with the [Texas A&M University department of biological and agricultural engineering](#).

“These devices have the potential to save water, but our data shows they’re just not there yet,” Swanson said.

Smart controllers use weather data to automatically adjust the amount of irrigation water applied. Some smart controllers use sensors at the irrigation sites to measure temperature and rainfall. They may also measure solar radiation, wind speed and relative humidity.

Other controllers, commonly called ET Controllers, use evapotranspiration data acquired either through the Internet, telephone or pager to estimate landscape water requirements, he said. Both ET and on-site sensor controllers use the data they receive to estimate evapotranspiration at the site and apply enough water to offset it.

Swanson and Dr. Guy Fipps, an AgriLife Extension engineer and director of the Irrigation Technology Center, tested both types of controllers over an eight-week period from early August through late September. ET controller bench tests were conducted in an indoor laboratory while an outdoor lab test was used for the controllers with on-site sensors.

### Why the gross inaccuracy?

Part of the answer is that there are several methods to calculate evapotranspiration. Swanson and Fipps used the Standardized Penman-Monteith method, a model generally recognized as the gold standard. This method takes into account many factors, including solar radiation, Swanson said. Generally, methods that factor in solar radiation will be more accurate.

“From what I’ve been able to gather, some companies are tying into the (local) airport or weather sta-

tions that are posted online, because every city has an airport,” Swanson said. “ET data calculated with such weather data tends to be inaccurate.”

Swanson noted that the units with on-site sensors did better in the tests than the ET controllers. The on-site sensor controllers applied on average about 70 percent less water than the ET controllers, and saved water compared to most manual applications.

Typically, manually controlled irrigation units on timers apply about twice as much water as needed, he said.

There are several possible causes for the over-irrigation, including improper ET values, high plant coefficients and insufficient accounting for rainfall.

The study is important because of the potential water savings by using smart irrigation controllers, Swanson said. Several Texas cities are currently considering making smart controllers mandatory with the installation of new irrigation systems. For example, the city of Frisco now mandates smart controllers.

“If these controllers are to become requirements across the state, then it is important that they be evaluated formally under Texas conditions,” Swanson said.

Swanson and Fipps noted in their formal report that although the smart irrigation controllers did over-water, they were potentially superior to manually controlled systems.

A copy of the report can be viewed on the Irrigation Technology Centers Web site at <http://ITC.tamu.edu>.

“The technology shows good promise but it definitely needs upgrading,” Swanson said, adding that manufacturers are constantly updating their products.

“Two (manufacturers) have contacted us on what they can do to make their controller better,” he said. “The others -- we’re still waiting on a response.” ❁



## Fall Army Worms

This fall we have received reports of armyworm problems cropping up in some urban lawns. Both our D-4 research landscape entomologist, Jim Reinert, and our agricultural extension entomologist, Allen Knutson, confirm an unusually heavy year of armyworms in District 4. Dr. Knutson notes that armyworms are extremely abundant now in pastures, hayfields and heat fields from Ellis County north to the Red River. Ag producers are applying insecticides to control AW in these crops this week.

Armyworms do not usually kill lawns, especially bermudagrass lawns, but will scalp them pretty well. Once treated, bermudagrass lawns generally recover within a few days. According to Dr. Reinert, St. Augustine lawns are more susceptible, depending on the severity of the damage. He says that if fall armyworm is allowed to defoliate it. Augustine-grass lawn, it may take up to 3 weeks to recover, or it may sometimes result in the loss of the lawn.

If you see damage but do not see the caterpillars themselves, you can try a flush with soapy water. Use 2 tablespoons of liquid dishwashing detergent in 2 gallons of water and drench an area 1 square yard. This method works best if the grass has been recently put. This method will flush caterpillars out of the ground or thatch quickly, within 1-5 minutes.



Armyworm caterpillars are well controlled with any of the [pyrethroid insecticides](#), such as permethrin, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin or asfenvalerate. Spot treatments or whole lawn treatments can be effective, depending on how prevalent the infestation is. Armyworms often move from agricultural fields or undeveloped land into residential lawns, so applying a 10 foot or so barrier of insecticide to lawn borders may be sufficient to prevent entry into the lawn. These caterpillars feed on the above-ground leaves of the grass. If an area of the lawn is defoliated, water and fertilizer—*at rates appropriate for the grass and time of year*) may help speed the process of recovery.

Fall armyworm can be identified by the three stripes on the shield behind the head and the white, inverted Y on the head itself. 🌸

### Other pest Information

<http://agnews.tamu.edu/showstory.php?id=1384> (Fire Ants)

<http://agnews.tamu.edu/showstory.php?id=1393> (Green June Beetles)

## Ginkgo: A Living Fossil

By Mary Nell Jackson

The small wall hanging that adorns my front porch reads: *Falling Leaves Return to their Roots*. I knew when I saw it that the words would be an inspiration to me and hopefully also to my garden visitors. The winter season is fast approaching, making our days shorter, and the leaves seem to be the first to know it is time for them to cease clinging to the branches of the trees.

My favorite tree, the Ginkgo (often called Maidenhair tree) begins to dazzle the garden with its display of bright yellow leaves in the fall, and almost overnight every last leaf will be all gone and the ground will be carpeted in yellow until the winds whisk them away. The name Ginkgo comes from the Japanese words, gin, “silver” and kyo “apricot.” The tree is very slow growing but if given good soil and plenty of organic material annually it will grow at a faster pace reaching 50 to 80 feet at maturity.

The Ginkgo [*Ginkgo biloba*] is native to China. On my first visit to New York City I was amazed at seeing so many Ginkgo trees planted along the streets but quickly realized the immigrants brought a bit of home to the far away city in the United States. I read that one botanical writer declared, “It will grow even at the pavement’s edge where buses breathe their unbreathable breath.” The fan shaped leaves had my heart at first glance. Later I visited jewelry stores finding the lovely Ginkgo leaves I had admired dipped in gold and used in earring and necklaces much like aspen leaf jewelry.

Ginkgo leaves are known as disease resistant, and in the Chinese and Japanese cultures, it is believed that they can repel fire. A fire that



destroyed almost all of Tokyo in 1923 did not, however, burn a temple that was surrounded by Ginkgo trees. It was believed that the leaves of the Ginkgo exude repelling moisture when threatened by fire.

The largest Ginkgo trees I have ever seen grow on the grounds of the First Methodist Church in Paris, Texas. I am not aware of their history but know that other interested gardeners have made a special trip to view them if they are near the vicinity. There is one other I have discovered near a garden center I frequently visit. It is struggling as the house near it was enlarged and the tree and roots were not properly protected. I am aware that the tree is able to endure high temperatures and survive near sidewalks but fear house renovation could be challenging at best. When I visited it last I could see the green leaves falling from the top portion; not a good sign in mid summer. I wished it well as I drove away.

Darwin had a name for the Ginkgo tree; he called it a ‘living fossil.’ It is 200 million years old. It lived during the same time of the dinosaurs and is the only surviving tree species un-

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changed from that era. It is classified as a gymnosperm, which makes the fruit a naked seed. I have always heard of the foul smelling fruit and been advised to not buy a female, although my research tells me that fruiting occurs only when male and female trees are grown together. The male and female flowers are borne on separate plants. Warm summers will encourage the fruiting. My tree is so slow growing I will never know if, as one British website puts it, my tree will have fruit that 'smells like sewerage works on a hot day.' I have only one tree for now and its sex is in question.

The key to the survival of the tree is its immunity to pests and fungal diseases. A testament to the trees longevity is a Ginkgo tree in Hiroshima, located about three-quarters of a mile from the area of the atomic blast in 1945, that still flourishes today.

In America the first recording of a Ginkgo brought from England was 1784 by William Hamilton. It was planted in the Woodland Cemetery near Philadelphia. Ginkgo orchards are common in China. The extract of the Ginkgo tree has been used for more than five thousand years in China and Japan. The leaves are made into an extract and the seeds/kernels are also used to treat memory loss, dementia, asthma, and depression. Many present-day herbalists gather the organically grown leaves for use in herbal teas. As with any medicinal uses of plant material, it is best to consult a professional.

Ginkgoes thrive in most well drained soil and are hardy in Zones 4 to 8. They are drought tolerant but appreciate good garden practices by giving them liberal amounts of nutrients. Avoid planting in a rocky soil.

Ginkgoes should be high on your list of trees in your landscape. Most gardening books advise to buy a seedless male tree and a plant grown from cuttings or grafts.



A glossary of Ginkgoes from *Martha Stewart's Living* magazine October 2009 lists the following that are available from [songsparrow.com](http://songsparrow.com) or check your local garden centers for availability. Fall is a perfect time to plant a Ginkgo in your landscape.

*'Mariken'* – compact ginkgoes, 2 feet tall and ½ feet wide in 10 yrs. and can be pruned to create a bonsai.

*'Summer Rainbow'* - can reach 14 feet tall and 8 feet wide in 10 years. Green and variegated leaves.

*'Saratoga'* - can climb to 40 feet with a 30 foot width.

*'Spring Grove'* - Dwarf to semi dwarf, it grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 1 ½ feet wide.

*'Jade Butterflies'* – a slow-growing dwarf, reaches 12 feet high and 5 feet in width in 10 yrs.

*'Tubifolia'* - grows to 3 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide in five years and has variable leaf forms on the same plant.

*'Majestic Butterfly'* - growing to 8 feet tall and 6 feet wide in five years, its leaves are yellow/green variegated.

*Ginkgo Biloba*- slow to medium growing to 50 to 60 feet.

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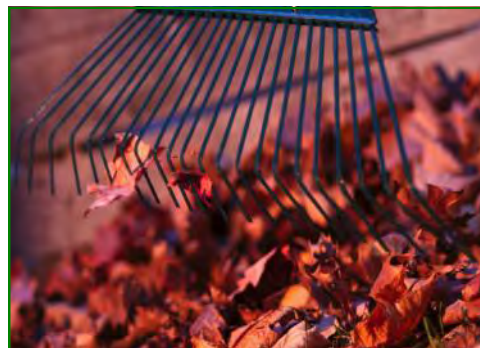
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*Martha Stewart Living Magazine*, October 2009 🌸

# Garden Checklist

By: Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist  
 This list was compiled from the 2008 updates by Texas A&M University, College Station, TX. The following information available at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/newsletters/hortupdate/tamuhort.html>.



- Roses often put on some of their best displays in the November-December period of cooler weather. Encourage them at this time with plenty of water during dry spells and good cultivation, finishing with a topping of fresh mulch to save moisture and ameliorate temperature changes.
- Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want. In addition to ordering seeds that you are already familiar with, try a few new kinds each year to broaden your garden contents.
- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well lighted window.
- Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. In the Panhandle, planting is often delayed until February or early March.
- Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus.
- Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so. Be sure to refrigerate tulips and hyacinths for 6-8 weeks prior to planting.
- Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't overwater. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.
- Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time in December if they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.
- Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half, to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.
- Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.

Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house. 🌸

**Thanks to ECHO Newsletter contributors:**

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