

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson



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Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.

Tomatoes are the most widely grown vegetable in the home garden and many serious tomato growers prefer to grow their own transplants from seeds. Master Gardener Ira Gervais will provide a presentation on "Growing Tomato Transplants from Seeds" on Dec. 9 at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park.

Typical gardening activities taper off at this time of year. Even though we have received a plentiful 50+ inches of rain from Hurricane Harvey about 3 months ago, we have received very little rain since that time. So while our annual rainfall to date is quite impressive, the rainfall that started on Sunday is much needed as our area was

entering into a pre-drought stage. The month of December ushers in a state of dormancy for many landscape trees and shrubs. What is good for plants is oftentimes good for the gardener. The month of December offers something for every gardener to do and even enjoy. Review the following gar-

dening checklist for December for gardening reminders and educational programs:

Applications Accepted for Master Gardener Course: Interested in becoming a Master Gardener? Applications are being accepted for the 2018 Galveston County Master Gardener Training Course which will start in Febru-



ary. Applications and other information are available online (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>). Applications must be received by the AgriLife Extension Office by Wednesday, January 10.

Master Gardener Newsletter

Online: The Galveston County Master Gardeners' newsletter is crammed full of useful information on Gulf Coast gardening ranging from commonly found insect pests in the garden to Master Gardeners listing their favorite landscape and vegetable plants. The November/December newsletter issue is available online (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>).

Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration Garden Tour: The Master Gardeners will conduct a "Garden with the Masters" program on Thursday, December 7. If you would like to see a flourishing array of cool season vegetables, then be sure to visit the Master Gardeners' Discovery Garden in Carbide Park on Thursday, Dec. 7. This has been a banner year for broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, spinach and other leafy greens. Visitors are welcome to casually tour the vegetable gardens, fruit orchard, Earth-Kind landscaping bed and the Serenity Garden from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Growing Tomato Transplants from Seed Seminar: Conducted on Saturday, December 9, from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St., La Marque). Many serious tomato growers prefer to grow their own transplants from seeds as they have

a wider selection of varieties to choose from and can have transplants ready earlier than those available at nurseries. Master Gardener Ira Gervais is our tomato whisperer and will share his tips for growing tomatoes from seeds.

Topics include how to pick the best varieties including heirlooms, where to obtain seeds, planting and growing techniques, and insect and disease control. A limited selection of seeds from several heirloom tomato varieties will be available free-of-charge. No fee but pre-registration required (phone [281-309-5065](tel:281-309-5065) or e-mail galvcountrymgs@gmail.com).

Journey of Two Frugal Master Gardeners Seminar: Conducted on Saturday, December 9, from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St., La Marque). Master Gardener Brenda Slough will provide a presentation that will explore the various types and techniques of plant propagation for you to assess which type(s) will best fit for your gardening needs. She will focus on chip budding as economical method to propagate bulbs. Pre-registration required (phone [281-309-5065](tel:281-309-5065) or e-mail galvcountrymgs@gmail.com) to ensure adequate availability of seminar handouts.

Till Garden Beds: Unlike our gardening friends above the Mason-Dixon Line, our soils don't freeze solid so we can work the garden soil and prepare beds for next spring's planting activities. When working garden soil, whether for

planting flowers and shrubs or a vegetable garden, never till or work the soil when it is wet, especially soil with high clay content. Tilling wet soil tends to degrade soil structure, forming large clods that may take a long time to break down. Soil works up best when it is slightly moist, yet crumbles readily after being hand-pressed into a ball.

POINSETTIAS: Christmas poinsettias are widely available now. Keep the potting soil evenly moist, never let the soil dry out or become soggy for long periods.

Poinsettias are often purchased with decorative foil wraps that do not allow water drainage. Be sure to take your poinsettia out of these types of decorative pots before watering. Water your poinsettia whenever the surface of the soil appears dry and the plant feels light when you lift it.

The best way to water a poinsettia is to place it in a sink and add water until it begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot. Keep the plant in the sink until all excess water has drained out of the pot and then place it back into its ornamental container.

If your poinsettia is sitting in a container with a saucer underneath, pour out any extra water the saucer captures after watering.

PRUNING: Don't be in a hurry to prune woody plants. Very late December through early February is usually the best time to perform most winter pruning.