Greetings all and welcome to a brand-new year!

Allow me to introduce myself: My name is Kim Townsend and I’m both humbled and honored to serve as the new President of the RCMGA. In brief, though originally from Lubbock, I grew up all over our great state, as well as many other major cities around the U.S. I’ve lived in Rockwall County for seven years, been a Texas Master Gardener for two, and (amongst other things) I’m a beekeeper, swarm catcher, musician, caregiver for my brother, Clint (who has ALS), and – like most people - can kill a plant with the best of ‘em! I also get a kick out of drawing “Pokey” cartoons for the EnviroSmart newsletters! But, hey – enough already; let’s get on to the really noteworthy stuff!

You know, it really doesn’t take much room to create a garden space that’s unique, beautiful, and inviting! Even the smallest area can become just that! Because gardening is such a fun and popular pastime, we’re thrilled to announce the long-awaited return of our most celebrated event: Our theme is Gardens Aplenty in 2020! This time around, the tour’s featured gardens will be conveniently set in a centralized area within walking distance of one another and are filled with an exciting diversity of plants - including native plants, heirlooms, and many that are far from average. Master Gardeners and homeowners alike will be on-site to answer questions, as each home’s landscape offers different points of interest. You’ll likely see a wide spectrum of flowers varying in height, texture and color; as well as innovative uses for garden beds in an array of shapes and sizes.

No doubt, you’re sure to leave inspired with plenty of fresh ideas to bring home and try in your own yards and gardens!

So, save the date: Saturday, May 16th - and, guess what else is going on that day? Rockwall Founders Day Festival! Tour of Gardens tickets go on sale on April 16th. Complete details on purchasing tickets will soon follow.

Next, there’s no shortage of activity at the Rockwall County Discovery Garden. In addition to some beautiful improvements throughout, the Children’s Garden area is currently being completely re-vamped! You may not be aware, but every 2-3 years, we change the subject of the Children’s Garden based on a garden/plant-themed children’s book. Past themes include Jack and the Beanstalk, The Little Red Hen, etc. This year, we’re creating scenes from the book Tops and Bottoms by Janet Stevens, a very clever story about a sharp-witted hare who (sort of) ‘tricks’ his lazy friend, Bear, out of the best part of the food crop time and again. At the Discovery Garden children will learn about growing vegetables and the different parts of a plant that are edible. They can decide what part of each plant they most enjoy eating, tops or bottoms? By April, the Children’s Garden area should be completed and ready for visitors of all ages to enjoy!

Finally, Master Gardeners use their areas of expertise to offer a variety of educational classes to the public each year. We are always looking for ways to help our community so let us know if there is a topic you would be interested in learning about!

All in all, it looks like 2020 is going to be one for the books – and I’m elated to partner with my fellow Master Gardeners in serving Rockwall County through these fun and educational community events!
Garden Exercise | Stretching before Gardening

Spring often brings gardeners achy muscles as they return to the soil. An investment of five to ten minutes of stretching before gardening can produce positive results in the prevention of injury and discomfort. Most commonly, discomfort is experienced in the back and shoulders. Simple exercises provide muscle relaxation and prepare them for the activities of gardening. These exercises should be performed slowly and smoothly. If pain is elicited, stop the movement. Chronic and acute pain should be evaluated by Health Care Providers. Safety in balance can be achieved using a stable object such as a chair or counter. Stay healthy while gardening with a few simple stretches:

- Bend knees slightly. Position feet wider than shoulders. Place hands on hips. Keep back straight, slowly squat down and then stand up using leg muscles. An alternative is using a chair or stool to sit on. Sit and stand up. Repeat 10 times.
- Place one foot forward with one back slightly. Place hands on hips. Push hips forward, while bending backward. Alternate to bending forward. Keep knees straight but not locked. Drop arms to sides and bend lowering arms. Hold each position for 2 seconds and repeat 5 times.
- With hands crossed over chest, twist until a gentle pull is felt on back. Hold this position for 2 seconds then twist to the other side. Avoid arching back. The head should move with shoulders. Repeat 5 times.
- Raise arms out at shoulder height in a T position. Make circles from small to large slowly backward then forward. Repeat 5 times. Raise your left arm in front of your face and make a semicircle to outer left as if cleaning a wall. Repeat process with the right arm. Repeat each arm 10 times.
- Roll neck clockwise and switch directions. Raise shoulders up toward ears and roll in both directions. Repeat 5 times.

These exercises can also be performed after gardening activities.

Power of Pollinators | Why Every Garden Needs Them

As we spend the spring and summer months tending our flower and vegetable gardens, it is always nice to devote some time to observing nature’s pollinators. As the monarch butterfly prepares for a flawless landing on the petals of Texas lantana, or a giant swallowtail sips nectar from a purple zinnia, let’s not overlook the honey bee or fuzzy bumble bee, with body and legs covered in pollen. These are all enchanting moments that remind us to celebrate the pollinator.

Without nature’s exquisite, fragile creatures adorning our plants and flowers, there would be no transfer of pollen. If this were to happen, a third of our country’s fruit and vegetable crops would vanish, and so, too would many of the flowers now growing in our gardens.

Ideally, habitat planning should include a wide variety of native and adapted flowers and flowering plants, trees and shrubs that are attractive to pollinators – including plants with different blooming periods. When making plant selections, we should keep in mind that native plants ultimately attract more native pollinators. Furthermore, the care and maintenance of native plants is minimal and so is the need for pesticides, resulting in a healthier, more abundant garden.

Creating pollinator-friendly gardens that encourage those extraordinary moments when a hummingbird, butterfly or bumble bee stops by to dazzle us with its presence can keep us all connected in ways that nature intended it to “bee”.

Tried and True Pollinator Favorites

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annuals</th>
<th>Perennials</th>
<th>Shrubs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Zinnia</td>
<td>Black-eyed Susan</td>
<td>Turk’s Cap</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian blanket</td>
<td>Purple coneflower</td>
<td>Texas lantana</td>
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<td>Baby blue eyes</td>
<td>Butterfly weed</td>
<td>Autumn sage</td>
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<td>Basil</td>
<td>Mexican hat</td>
<td>Esperanza</td>
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EnviroSmart

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Spring is just around the corner...let the bagworm infestations begin! Actually, the bagworm cocoons, each containing hundreds of eggs, are probably in your evergreen trees right now. As the weather warms, these eggs will hatch tiny voracious eating machines. They will eat most anything but prefer conifers like arborvitae, juniper, cypress, pine and spruce.

Get a head start now by inspecting your trees and bushes for their signature cocoon, made of silk and pieces of the tree to create a camouflaged, cocoon-looking bag, that resembles that of a butterfly. With a sharp pair of scissors, cut off as many as you can and place them in a container of soapy water, making sure they sink to the bottom and drown. If they are too high to reach, there are several options to organically or chemically reduce the population. Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis) is effective provided you spray in the spring as soon as the eggs have hatched and reapply on a weekly basis until the infestation is gone. For chemical control, spray when the bagworms are actively feeding, usually after dark. I recommend spraying an insecticide listed for bagworms at dusk, as needed, making sure the chemical gets to the top of the affected plant.

Another option is systemic chemical control. A systemic insecticide is applied as a drench (poured at the base of the plant) and is absorbed by the plant to control infestations of leaf chewing pests. The insecticide is taken up into the leaves (insect food) where the bagworm eats it and dies. The downside is that it takes some time for the plant to move the insecticide from the root zone into the foliage. Follow the application and safety instructions on any product you use.

March: First half of the month, plant the following by direct seeding: spinach, Swiss chard, collards, leaf lettuce, turnips and radishes. Second half of the month, plant the following by direct seeding: sweet corn, cucumber, pumpkin, mustard, summer and winter squash, and watermelon. Plant the following transplants: pepper and tomato.

April: First half of the month, plant the following by direct seeding: bush, pole and lima beans, cantaloupe, Southern peas, pepper, sweet potato, and okra. Plant the following transplant: eggplant.

May: Spring vegetable planting is now complete. Fertilize monthly with an all-nitrogen fertilizer and weed your garden weekly. Mulch the weeds and mix with brown leaves for the compost bin or tumbler.

Spring gardens

Vegetables

Lawn Tips

- Around early March, apply pre-emergent weed killer to stop the germination of warm-season grassy and broadleaf weeds. For weeds that you can already see, apply a post-emergent weed killer.

- Fertilize lawn after the second or third mowing in the spring. A fertilizer high in nitrogen with low or no phosphorus and potassium is recommended.

- Green-up and recovery of Bermuda grass begins when nighttime temperatures remain above 60˚F for several days and soil temperatures reach 65˚F. Winter lawn damage from dry conditions and/or freezing temperatures will begin to show in spring.

Pokey Springs Forward
March 17 - Water Wise: How to Water Your Garden Efficiently - $15
Class will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Rockwall County Extension Office.
Call 972-204-7660 or email rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu to pay and preregister by March 12.

April 4 - Rockwall Youth Fair Livestock Show and Sale
The Discovery Garden will be open and Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer questions from 9a.m — 2 p.m. Come check out the progress of the children's garden renovations and see what is in bloom.
875 Riding Club Road, Rockwall, TX 75087

May 16 - Gardens Aplenty in 2020! RCMGA Tour of Gardens
Saturday, May 16th
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Tickets go on sale April 16th. Visit rockmga.org for more information.

Wednesday Gardening Hot Line: “Ask a Master Gardener!” Volunteers will be answering calls and emails every Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. Call (972) 204-7660 or email us at: rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu.