

It's All a Matter of Perspective
By Shirley D. Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener

After the past few days of February it seems as if winter may indeed be on the wane. Here in our part of Texas our winters have always been fairly mild, but this last one seemed to be more so. I look out my window and see that my buffalo grass yard is turning a lovely shade of green. Yea! But, wait! As I look closer it is not the grass that is turning green it is weeds! Where did they all come from? They were not there two weeks ago! Because I did not put out pre-emergent back in the early Fall, I am now blessed with a profusion of every weed imaginable. But, wait, what is that lovely little purple flower I see out there? O my, it is henbit. That's a weed? Well, if it is it certainly is a pretty one. And, look, there is another. It has tiny white flowers in a bunch growing from small bumpy leaves. That is bi-colored mustard. Don't see any mustard color on it, but is beautiful. Beneath our feet lie many of these tiny flowers. We don't see them because we are not looking for them, but they are there.



Start looking down and if you begin to count the different types of tiny flowers you will be utterly amazed at how many different varieties you see. So, is it a weed or is it a flower???? My definition of a weed is this: it is a plant (any kind) that is growing where it is not supposed to grow. Using that logic, even a rose could be called a weed. So, before you slap the name "weed" to a particular plant, look at

it closely to find the beauty that lies within its leaf shape and flowers. For years now, I have been associated with a group of four folks that weekly go out and identify plants. It did not take long before my view of what is or is not a weed began to change. What I once saw as a pesky weed to be yanked out of the ground and tossed into the compost pile has now caused me to pause and consider its beauty. Even a field of the lowly dandelion when viewed from a distance is striking. To weed or not to weed, that is the question!

Happy gardening.

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/gardening-articles/garden-articles-2012#Mar2012>

Wade's WallyWorm Word HORSERADISH

"WallyWorm, how were your times since we last talked?" asks Wade

"Well, the extra day of February was okay, but what happens to the extra six hours per year that hides from us until they are suddenly found on February 29 every four years?" responds WallyWorm

"Probably reserved in a time capsule until needed; but you look a little stressed, what's wrong?" Wade comes back

"I'm sore from all that leaping on leap day. Do you realize the effort I have to put out to jump?" WallyWorm complains

"Well, this should take your mind off your pains. Mull this over in your spare time. Milton Berle is given credit for this.

"I'd rather be a could-be if I cannot be an are;
Because a could-be is a maybe reaching for a star.
I'd rather be a has-been than a might-have-been, by far,
For a might-have-been has never been, but a has was once an are.



Now, don't you feel better now? WallyWorm! I just got word that the International Herb Association named horseradish "Herb of the Year for 2011", how about that Wallyworm?" asks Wade

"What's so special about horseradish?" asks Wallyworm

"Well, the herb is treasured for its' roots, which around 24 million pounds are harvested in the U.S.A., mainly around St. Louis, and

processed into 6 million gallons of prepared horseradish. The U.S.A. supplies 60% of the world's production.

Here is a little history lesson of this, high in vitamin C, mustard family herb. Back around 1500 BC it was used for a lower back pain rub, an aphrodisiac, and eaten during the Jewish Passover. From 1300 to 1600 AD it was used as a cough expectorant, a treatment for food poisoning, scurvy, tuberculosis, and colic. From 1601 to 1700 it was used for food flavoring. From 1840 to the present, it has mainly been used for a condiment.



The "heat" is caused by rupturing cell walls, releasing isothiocyanate oils. Adding vinegar stops the reaction and the heat level is controlled by when the vinegar is added. Horseradish contains allylisothiocyanate which is a protection against Listeria, E.Coli, Staphylococcus Aureus and other food pathogens." concludes Wade

This piquant information was acquired from: www.horseradish.org

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/wallyworm-word#Mar12Horseradish>

AROUND THE FEEDER THE AMERICAN ROBIN

By Joan Orr and Nancy Hillin, Somervell County Master Gardeners



The promise of spring comes to us in many forms, but none quite as wonderful as the arrival of these red-breasted beauties of the Thrush family. The United States and Canada are the year round home and breeding range of the Robin. As the weather becomes colder and food sources in the northern portion of their range become less available, the Robin will travel to the most southern parts of the United States and often venture as far as Guatemala. So when we see the Robin return here, we know that it is finding its food source of worms, insects and fruit. And, we know that spring is upon us.

The first item on the Robin's meal plan for the day is worms. They will tilt their heads with one eye on the ground hunting for worms and the other watching for predators. Hawks, cats and large snakes will quickly make the Robin their meal for the day. The afternoons are spent foraging for fruit. Robins favor fruits and berries from Dogwoods, Hawthorns, Junipers, Sumacs and Chokecherries. They also like Honeysuckle and Pyracantha berries, but if they eat them at the fermented stage a drunken dance will sure to follow.

Males arrive a few days to several weeks before females to breeding grounds to establish a territory. Females choose a mate according to his song, plumage and his ability to defend the nesting site. The first nest of the year is often built in Evergreen trees because in some areas deciduous trees are not leafed out yet. The female constructs a nest that is about baseball size with twigs and mud. She uses her breast covered with mud to shape the nest to fit her body and lines it with soft grasses. She will produce two broods, occasionally three, per season with three to four off-springs per brood. The pale blue eggs are about the size and weight of a quarter and will hatch within two weeks. The mother will brood the chicks while they are young and after that only at night or bad weather. Two more weeks will pass before the young become fledglings. Both parents feed the chicks until they become fledglings and can forage alone. And even after achieving sustained flight the off-spring will follow their parents for a time. After the breeding season, Robins roost in flocks by night and feed together by day.

Here are a few things you can do to help the Robin population:

- If you find a chick on the ground with little to no down or feathers, feel free to return it to the nest if you can. Robins will not reject a chick because of human contact.
- Avoid using insecticides and other toxins on the ground.
- Keep a small muddy area for the female to use in nest building.

- Investigate trees for nests before doing any pruning.
- Keep a bird bath full and clean.
- Offer dried or fresh fruits from a platform feeder.
- Plant Evergreen trees for nest building and other trees and shrubs as listed above for food sources.

Robins are fairly social creatures and will often allow you to come close for a great photo or just to watch as they search for worms or an occasional snail. The arrival of the Robin announces the most welcomed season of the year by gardeners and all those that love the great outdoors. It is a joy to see them again!

Source: Birds and Blooms 2012

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/around-the-feeder#Mar12Robins>

Favorite Plant - Hardy Amaryllis *Hippeastrum johnsonia*

By Donna Hagar



Perennial bulb

Height 18"

Blooms in late March to April on 12-18" stalks. Each stalk produces 4-6 red trumpet shaped flowers, with white stripes.

Propagate by dividing bulbs.

Deer resistant

Very easy to grow, well adapted to a variety of soil types and growing conditions. Naturalizes well, tolerates poor soil and cold and heat throughout Texas.

I have some Hardy Amaryllis that started back in the 70's. My grandmother gave some to my mother that she acquired while spending a snowbird winter in the Texas valley. My mother did not have a good spot for them in her landscape and just tossed them behind the air conditioner unit in our back yard in Houston. Well, they thrived! When my parents then retired to Arizona in the early 80's, I nabbed a handful of the bulbs and planted them in our first home in Garland. I have since divided and moved these descendants to 4 more homes and given away countless bulbs to friends. This is definitely one of my favorite plants and every year when it blooms, I am reminded of my grandmother.

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/favorite-plants/favorite-plants-2012#Mar12Amaryllis>

March 2012 Garden Tips

By Julie Conner, Somervell County Master Gardener



Let's do it, let's get our seeds in the ground. March and April is the spring planting time in our zone. Texas Gardener Magazine gives a list of garden veggies which can be planted in March and April: beans, corn, cucumber, eggplant, mustard, okra, peas, pepper, pumpkin, squash, tomato and watermelon. Pick your favorite veggie, grab your hoe, your gloves and the ever popular knee pad and head for your garden.

You have prepared the soil haven't you? NO, well then first things first. Improved soil by adding organic matter is one of the prime steps to a successful growing season. Having your soil tested will give you a ph gage as well as what nutrients you are lacking, to help decide what kind and amount of organic matter to use. Aged manures, compost, fresh grass clipping or mulch can add nutrients and air to your soil.

Start the garden bed free of weeds, which can crowded your small seedlings taking sunlight, nutrients and water. Mulch will also slow weed growth and help retain moisture. Mulch can be well-rotted compost, dried grass clippings, newspaper or shredded leaves or bark. Keep the garden well mulched all season long.

I always make a slight hill in my garden row so water can drain and the seed is not subject to water damage due to sitting in a puddle. A good plan of delivering water will also be needed for a successful growing season. Drip systems are especially efficient, but with my tomatoes and peppers last year I placed a 10 or 12 inch pot between the plants and delivered water and fertilizer to them by hand.



Another important step is record keeping, relying on memory may be fine for some, but I find I may remember what I did in the garden last year but 2 - 3 years back start to become a blur. Write it down, because crop rotation is a good garden practice.

Happy Planting!

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/tips/tips-2012#Mar12Tips>