

MILBERGER LANDSCAPE & NURSERY

THE GARDENING NEWSLETTER FOR SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS

NOVEMBER 2020

PLANT QUESTIONS

We use primula for color in shaded containers during the winter. How much should we fertilize them? Fertilize primula (primrose) in containers with Osmocote at planting. They also respond well to a soluble fertilizer like Miracle Gro dissolved in the irrigation water at least once per month.

I planted two 12 ft Mexican white oaks in July this year. Can I prune some of the lower branches off the trunk now? It is best for the tree's growth rate if you do not reduce its leaf surface this early in its growth. Wait until the side branches grow to at least one inch in diameter before you do any pruning.

The phalaenopsis orchids are laying flat and looks dead. Can I perk them up to bloom again? Yes, if you water them each week by placing them a sink to drain after the bark mix is wetted. Include soluble fertilizer in the water. Phalaenopsis orchids do well in windows with a southern or eastern exposure.

If you have gardening or landscaping questions we have the answers. Just ask any of the friendly, knowledgeable, and experienced nursery staff at Milberger's Nursery.



Camellias are beautiful winter blooming evergreens with dark green foliage accenting single, semi-double and double flowers in pink, white and red. Excellent container plant for semi-shady areas. November is the best time to get your Camellias started.

GARDENING EXPERTISE

Camellias – Southern Charm with a History

by Keith C. Hansen, Extension Horticulturist

Fall and winter bring out the flowers of one of the loveliest blooming shrubs we can grow – Camellias. Camellias are evergreen shrubs or small trees. Their leaves are alternately arranged, simple, thick, serrated, and usually glossy. Their flowers are usually large and conspicuous with colors that can vary from white through pink colors to red. Like many other wonderful plants we grow and admire in the landscape, camellias are native to the Orient. In our part of the world they work well in partial or full shade. If planted in full sun, the leaves may get scalded and turn yellow instead of the normal dark green.

(MORE ON PLANTING CAMELLIAS ON PAGE THREE)

Our web site and the email version of this newsletter contain many color photographs, how-to-do-it diagrams, more complete articles, links to many gardeners references and many more answers to your gardening and landscape questions. Visit www.MilbergerNursery.com to sign up. We respect your privacy and we will not share your address or information with anyone not associated with this newsletter.

NATURALIST BY NATURE

Got Holes in Your Lawn? Here's the 'Dillo

By Seth Patterson

Bugs and good grub. These are two tasty reasons an armored, insect-eating mammal may be digging about your yard. Have you ever been rushing out the door on your way to work only to suddenly be stopped in your tracks by the sight of dozens of small conical holes in your yard?

It's likely the work of the notorious nine-banded armadillo. These curious little critters, which happen to be the state mammal of Texas, sport extremely poor eyesight and sub-par hearing. But an armadillo's sense of smell is quite uncanny. And the answer to why they found their way to your yard lies in their diet: bugs. 'Dillos love insects, especially grubs, and they use their long tongues to slurp up slimy earth worms.

So how do you keep armadillos from digging up your lawn? A good initial step is to cut back on watering so your grass dries out sufficiently between watering events. Not only will this save you water (and money), but it will also promote a healthier, more drought resistant lawn. More importantly, it reduces the soft, moist soils that bugs thrive in and armadillos love to dine on.

As San Antonio grows, suburbia inches its way further and further into the country and right smack into the home of the armadillo. Just like deer, armadillos are here to stay. It's best if we learn to coexist with — if not come to appreciate — these fascinating critters.



To find us: Take the Bulverde Exit off of Loop 1604. The entrance to Milberger's is next to the Circle K gas station.

Milberger's Landscape Nursery

Open 9:00 to 6:00 Monday to Saturday
And 10:00 to 5:00 on Sundays

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Our Writers have the answers: **Dr. Jerry Parsons** is a well renown Horticulture Specialist who is retired from the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in San Antonio; **Dr. Calvin Finch** is the retired Director of Water Conservation and Technology at the Texas A&M University System. The Gardening Newsletter for South Central Texas is edited by Marc Hess at mhess@hctc.coop.

Milberger's Nursery November Features

GREENSHADE Rebate



Get Paid To Plant Shade Trees in Your Landscape

Get paid to plant trees in your yard. CPS' Green Shade Rebate Program will reimburse customers

\$50 PER TREE for approved trees planted between Oct 1, 2020 and Apr 30, 2021.

Visit our web site MilbergerNursery.com for complete information, reimbursement application forms, and instructions.

Milberger's Nursery will be
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 so we can celebrate with family and friends
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 and ALL WEEKEND**

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for the
Holidays?** 

Visit Milberger's Nursery to find a unique collection of holiday decorations for your home, hearth and yard.
**WREATHS ~ GARLANDS
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Planning for a Water Garden?
 Milberger's has Pumps for your water garden, Koi, Water Plants and expert advice.

Gardening South Texas on the air at KLUP (am 930)
 Saturday and Sunday 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.
 To have your gardening questions answered during show hours ONLY call
 210-308-8867 or 1-866-308-8867

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GARDENING EXPERTISE

Camellias

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

Camellias prefer a well-drained, yet moisture-retentive, acidic soil rich in organic matter, although sasanquas seem to tolerate poorer soil conditions. Most soils in Texas support good camellia growth if properly amended. Prepare the soil before planting by incorporating lots of organic matter like compost or composted pine bark. The best time to plant camellias is October through March, although they can be established any time of the year if given proper care.

Plant camellias no deeper than they were grown in the container, digging the hole twice to three times as wide. Planting too deep is a good way to kill a camellia. If you have heavy clay soil, plant high and bring soil in to cover the root ball.

“If you’ve been thinking about adding camellias to your landscape, now is a great time to get ready. While camellias can be set out anytime of the year if properly cared for, late fall thru early spring is the ideal time to plant them.”

~ Bob Shearer, Master Gardener

Although the best location for camellias is a partially shaded site, camellias will tolerate either shade or full sun, though growth will be spindly and blooming will be reduced in dense shade and leaf scorch can result in full sun. Flower color and growth is the best under the partial shade of tall

trees, like pines. The north or east side of a house will also provide a good exposure.

A thick layer of mulch over the surface of the soil benefits the shallow root system by providing a more uniform soil temperature and moisture level. Established camellias will tolerate a temporary dry spell, but will perform much better if given supplemental water in the summer.

It is better to lightly feed camellias small amounts of fertilizer a couple of times in the spring and early summer rather than in one large dose.



The aristocrats of the old Southern gardens, **Camellias** are famous for their winter blooming color when other plants go dormant. They have rich evergreen foliage, they are easily shaped to almost any shape and height, flower in shady areas, are pretty disease resistant and tolerate drought once established.

Ask the gardening experts at Milberger’s Nursery for more suggestions that will help keep your garden full of color as the cooler weather approaches. You will find healthy plant stock, good advice and creative suggestions for your specific landscape. To see what is on sale each week visit our web site at www.milbergernursery.com.

HOME GARDENING

Buying a Home? Gauge Its Gardening Potential

By Sarah Gorton, SAWS Conservation Planner

Picked out the perfect plot to plant your cottage-style dreamscape? Your new home's soil, shade and other attributes may have different plans.

For some people, one of the biggest perks to buying a home is the freedom to garden, to plant whatever they want without restrictions from landlords or managers.

Just be aware that nature will still limit what you can and can't grow. If gardening is a priority, keep these things in mind before deciding on your dream dwelling.

☘ Sunlight

You'll find some houses with massive towering oak trees, and some with no trees at all. The level of sunlight will affect what plants you can grow.

For example, if you want to plant a prairie, you won't be able to do that in a shaded yard. However, if you're more into Turk's cap and inland sea oats, a shaded yard would work just fine. Also, if you intend to grow vegetables, make sure there's at least one section that enjoys full sun.

☘ Soil

San Antonio's unique and diverse soil profile also affects what plants you can grow. The more soil you have, the more plant options there are and the easier it will be to keep plants happy and healthy. Areas inside Loop 410 and southward have very deep clay soils, while shallower soil occupies the area between Loops 410 and 1604. Outside Loop 1604 (think Stone Oak area), soil is almost non-existent.



The most beautiful and productive garden beds are the result of planning the size, shape and location. In South Texas it is important to select plants and blooms that are well adapted to our climate. Milberger's is your best source of bedding, plants, and flowers with fresh stock arriving on a regular basis and the best plants for the season put on sale weekly.

☘ Maintenance

When deciding on the right property for you, consider how much time you want to spend mowing and pruning. This will also be affected by the size of the lot the house sits on.

Check out our guide to comprehensive maintenance to determine what sounds like fun and what doesn't.

Finally, it's important to keep in mind how each of these choices will affect your water bill. If you have a massive yard in full sun and you want to grow St. Augustine grass, that will cause a serious spike in your water bill. But if you opt for a home with a small forest towering over it and grow mostly native plants, your water bill will be much lower because native plants don't need a lot of water.

Ask the gardening experts at Milberger's Nursery for more suggestions that will help get your garden into full bloom. You will find healthy plant stock, good advice and creative suggestions for your landscape and gardening needs from the experienced nursery staff. To see what is on sale each week visit our web site at www.milbergernursery.com.

LANDSCAPE ALTERNATIVES

The Zen of Xeriscape

By Mark Peterson, SAWS Conservation Project Manager

Dreaming of a lounge-chair-worthy landscape that's high style and low maintenance? Xeriscape may be the fuss-free remedy your weary soul is searching for. Coined in 1981 by employees at Denver Water, the word xeriscape (xeris is Greek for dry) refers to combining a low maintenance landscape with low water use.

A xeriscape is not rocks, decomposed granite, cactus, agaves, or rain barrels, although these could all be components of one. In its simplest form a xeriscape is minimal lawn, native flowering perennials and shrubs, mulch and other soil amendments, and pervious patios or decks.

Planning and design: Consider aspect, shade, slope, soil, and existing and desired species. The goal is to aim for one third lawn, one third beds and one third pervious patio or deck.



Just because it's a xeriscape doesn't mean that it can't be lively and colorful. There are many native Texas plants, which conserve water, provide a habitat for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, and save money on fertilizers and pesticides. Your xeriscape will do well with select nonnative plants that are adapted to Texas, meaning they are drought, heat, and pest tolerant. Texas Superstar® Plants catalogues plants that are beautiful and show superior performance under Texas's tough growing conditions.

“A Xeriscape landscape can provide color and a lush look with about one-third of the water and maintenance of a traditional lawn-dominated landscape in which grass is kept green all summer.”

~ Dr. Calvin Finch

Soil amendments: One way to increase water holding capacity is to add amendments, such as compost. Add one inch of compost to the soil to beds in spring and fall and ¼ inch over lawns during the same seasons.

Efficient irrigation: Of course, the most efficient irrigation is rain, but we recommend using a hand-held hose or soaker hoses. In-ground irrigation system, on the other hand, use 50 percent more water (70 percent in the summer) than a hose-end sprinkler or hand-held hose.

Mulch: Two inches of mulch, whether organic like woodchips or river rock, is sufficient. Xeric plants prefer limited mulch.

Limited lawn: Lawns use an excessive amount of water. By reducing the amount of lawn, you not only minimize mowing, but also significantly reduce how much water you use.

Looking for turf grass? Visit Milberger's sample lawn areas. You are invited to examine and walk on these sample lawn areas to help you determine the look and feel of the turf you prefer. We also have information and specification sheets on the different sods. Visit www.milbergernursery.com.

TREES AND SHRUBS

Native Shrubs for Local Landscapes

By Brad Wier, SAWS Conservation Consultant

It can be tricky to choose native substitutes for the cookie-cutter evergreens that populate so many suburban property lines. San Antonio is at the extreme endpoint of so many eco-regions — the Texas Hill Country, South Texas plains, Blackland Prairie and Post Oak

Savanna. There's no shortage of native plant options and plenty of niches and micro-climates for them.

But in terms of big landscape shrubs it can be tricky to choose native substitutes for the cookie-cutter evergreens that populate so many property lines in new suburbs.

With this in mind, here are some suggestions for native screens and hedge-like plants that retain their leaves in winter. You will find these plants already easily available at Milberger's Nursery

Cenizo (Texas sage) is the ultimate South Texas shrub: it basks in summer sun with or without water, and tolerates hedge shears to boot. Among the most drought-tolerant of all big landscape shrubs, it makes a standard by which others can be measured. Humidity and rain will bring storms of pink flowers into cenizo's branches, earning it the nickname "barometer bush."



Agarita is signature Texas native (deer-proof and drought proof) that has been replaced by Chinese holly and leatherleaf mahonia in the suburban landscape. Pair this native with your yucca, evergreen sumac or mountain laurel to restore Hill Country flourish to your homestead. Agarita is a rounded shrub with beautiful gray-green, holly-like foliage and clusters of fragrant yellow flowers from February through April. The fruit that follows is a bright red berry that is a magnet for birds and small mammals and which makes a delicious jelly.

Texas mountain laurel is a sentimental favorite, with mind-boggling purple flowers every year in time for Texas Independence Day. Mountain laurel is right at home in Hill Country rock. It's usually grown as a single tree, but in Laurel Heights and older

neighborhoods you'll see it sculpted into hedgerows. Left on its own to reseed, it forms thicket-like masses of lustrous dark green.

Yaupon holly's red Christmas berries are ubiquitous in irrigated residential and commercial landscapes across the North Side, since yaupon can be endlessly sheared, topiaried or trained up as an ornamental tree. It doesn't mind growing in clay, but it does prefer moisture more than rock.

A fast-growing coastal shrub, **wax myrtle** grows in clay loam or sandy soils (like those of southeastern Bexar County from

Highlands all the way to Floresville.) It makes a great "instant hedge" and a native alternative to photinia and ligustrum.

The scent of **Ashe juniper** (mountain cedar) at night is synonymous with the Texas Hill Country, but strikes horror into the hearts of allergy sufferers. It's only the male plants that release pollen. Instead of cutting down all your cedars, keep an instant informal hedge by retaining a few females (just look for the blue berries.)

NOVEMBER GARDENING TIPS

Planting, Pruning and Time to Fertilize

By Dr. Jerry Parsons

Plant: November and December are the ideal months to plant trees and shrubs. It is the ideal time to move trees and shrubs as well. Planting now gives the plant time to establish its root system before the shoot growth develops in the spring. Also, usually little supplemental watering is required through the winter. Look around at the fall color and see which plants you would like to add to your landscape. Make certain your final choices are from the list of recommended trees and shrubs for this area found at www.milbergernursery.com.

Many of South Central Texas' finest wildflowers can be seeded now and bluebonnets can be transplanted.

Prune: This is the ideal pruning time for many trees and shrubs. If you have oak trees in need of pruning, begin now. It is especially critical in areas where the oak wilt fungus is a problem. Apply horticultural tree wound dressing on all oak cuts. Prune out dead, damaged or diseased wood from trees and shrubs. Avoid topping or dehorning.

Fertilize: If you have procrastinated the application of the most important lawn fertilization of the year — the application of a “Winterizer” fertilizer to condition the grass for winter survival — do it before December. The fertilizers to use are the ones which have “Winterizer” on the bags and are complete (contains all three elements – nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) analysis with 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratios.

On the Lookout: Watch for pillbugs (sowbugs or rollie-pollies) eating seedlings and young transplants of flowering annuals such as bluebonnets, pansies, etc. Control with a barrier of an insecticide or by using baits until the plants are older and tougher. Scale and other hard-to-kill insect pests may be overwintering on your trees or shrubs.

Odd Jobs: Do not allow heavy accumulations of leaves to pile up on the lawn area. If they get wet and pack together, the grass can be damaged. It is best to rake leaves or pick them up with a mower and bagger and place them in a compost pile or spread them over the garden area and work them into the soil. Add additional fertilizer to assist in decomposition.

For more detailed and complete Gardening Tips for this month visit www.MilbergerNursery.com.

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Christmas Trees

Milberger's will have the freshest, most reliable selection of Christmas Trees in San Antonio. Fresh cut, displayed and kept in water.

In the nursery after Thanksgiving.



A member of the primrose family, **Cyclamen** are an all-star winter-blooming plant for the shade. Late October thru early November is the ideal time to plant and establish cyclamen. These plants are so gorgeous that everyone who has grown them in the past greatly enjoys them. The flowers stand above the attractive three inch heart-shaped leaves on stalks that reach about one foot in height. Unless the weather gets extremely cold, cyclamen will bloom every day, all winter, until April.