

Gregg County Office
405 E. Marshall, Ste. 101
Longview, TX 75601
903-236-8429

2-20-2011

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

**DENNIS SMITH
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT
GREGG COUNTY**

Gregg County Garden and Landscape Seminar

With the beautiful weather we have been blessed with this past week, it is creating "Gardening Fever" for many East Texans. This is an excellent time to do the planning for a successful spring gardening. Now is the time to make plans to attend the Gregg County Master Gardeners "Spring Garden and Landscape Seminar." This annual seminar will be held on Saturday, March 5, 2011 at the First United Methodist Church Faith Center in Longview. Advance tickets are available from the Gregg County Extension office or any Gregg County Master Gardener for only \$10. Tickets at the door are \$12. Registration for the seminar will begin at 8:00 a.m. with the program concluding by noon.

The theme for the seminar is "Vegetable Gardening." Mr. Tom LeRoy, County Extension Agent – Horticulture will be one of the two featured speakers. Mr. LeRoy will present information on "Vegetable Gardening" and "Everything You Want to Know about Tomatoes." Ms. Leslie Halleck, Horticulturist, Botanist and Gardener from Dallas will be discussing the topic: "Culinary Herbs". The Master Gardeners will also will have a "Ask a Master Gardener" exhibit. Come with your gardening questions and ask one of the knowledgeable Gregg County Master Gardeners!

The morning seminar will also feature many local vendors, door prizes, a raffle and refreshments.

Check Soil Temp before Planting

With the first warm days of spring, gardeners are anxious to get their vegetable seed in the ground. Unfortunately, it is not the air temperature, but the soil temperature that controls seed germination. We have to wait for

the soil temperature to reach the optimum for a specific crop if we hope to get a good stand of vigorous seedlings.

Soil temperatures at which vegetable seed will grow are classified into four categories - the minimum temperature required for seed growth, an optimum temperature, a "realistic" soil temperature and, maximized temperature above which little germination will occur. The realistic soil temperature is that temperature somewhere between optimum and minimum at which gardeners should plant to insure maximum success. For instance, the optimum soil temperature for seed germination of vegetable crops such as cucumber, cantaloupe, okra, pumpkin, squash and watermelon is 95 degrees F, but the heat of summer will decrease yields and plant vigor. Yet if a gardener plants when the soil temperature reaches only 60 degrees F, the vegetable seed will germinate and grow, but not vigorously. Thus, there must be a "realistic" soil temperature. For the above-mentioned crops, the realistic soil temperatures (degrees F) for best plant production are: cucumber (64), cantaloupe (68), okra (73), pumpkin (75), squash (70), and watermelon (72). Crops such as beans, beets, cabbage, chard, eggplant, pepper, radish, tomato, turnip and corn have an optimum soil temperature for seed germination of 85 degrees F. Yet the minimum soil temperature required for certain of these cold-tolerant crops such as beets, cabbage, chard, radish and turnip is as low as 40 degrees F. The realistic soil temperature (degrees F) recommended for these crops are: beans (72), beets (45), cabbage (54), chard (54), eggplant (75), pepper (64), radish (45), tomato (55), turnip (50), and corn (55).

As might be expected, those vegetables which are really the cold weather champs such as carrots, parsley, lettuce and spinach have lower optimum soil temperatures for seed germination. For instance, the optimum soil temperature for seed germination of carrots is 80 degrees F, for parsley and lettuce is 75 degrees F, and for spinach is 70 degrees F. The minimum temperature required for these crops is 35 degrees F. The realistic soil temperature at which all of these crops should be planted is 45 degrees F. The outdoor soil temperature may be manipulated by covering the ground first with black plastic, then clear plastic with an air layer between formed by a series of thin strips of wood. The clear plastic traps solar heat, the black plastic absorbs it, and the air layer insulates and reduces loss due to

convection and radiation. A good soil thermometer is important so you can see when the soil has warmed sufficiently to allow planting of the seed.

Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at dg-smith@tamu.edu or telephone at: 903-236-8429.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.