

# 2010 DALLAS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER'S SCHOOL

**Program Title:** "Vegetables for North Texas Gardeners" (1:00pm – 4:00pm)  
**Presented By:** Dr. Jerry Parsons, Retired Professor and Extension Horticulturist,  
Texas AgriLife Extension Service, San Antonio

## About Dr. Parsons:

"I grew up in Tennessee, just outside Memphis. My great uncle was a big gardener. I like to eat tomatoes and I like to grow them ... it just got out of control from there." (*Texas Gardener Magazine* at: [http://plantanswers.com/Pure\\_Parsons.htm](http://plantanswers.com/Pure_Parsons.htm)). And so, according to Jerry Parsons, began his career in horticulture. Responsible for educating and entertaining audiences with weekly horticultural information through TV, radio and newspapers, Parsons' enthusiastic combination of irreverent and educational humor have made him an 'edutainment' pioneer – not to mention something of a cult figure in the agricultural world of south Texas.

Jerry earned a B.S. in agricultural education from the University of Tennessee, followed by an M.S. in vegetable production from Mississippi State and a Ph.D. in fruit production from Kansas State. He arrived in San Antonio in 1974 as a horticulturist for Texas Cooperative Extension, specializing in vegetable production. Over the years, he revolutionized the plant introduction arena and is the father of CEMAP (*Coordinated Educational Marketing Assistance Program*) at Texas A&M University. CEMAP is a plant introduction and promotion program that is now a model for similar programs throughout the U.S.

Parsons is credited with having introduced all of the productive hybrid tomatoes (*Celebrity, Heatwave, Merced, among many others*), peppers, Brussels sprouts, cantaloupe, sweet corn, onion, squash, broccoli, spinach and cauliflower. He introduced mandarin oranges as container plants for colder climates to Texas gardeners. He was also the talent behind the introduction of numerous Texas Superstar™ plants and many popular flowers (*Blue Shade ruellia, Firebush, Texas Gold columbine, Belinda's Dream rose, Laura Bush petunia, Stars and Stripes pentas, to name a few*). Sometimes called the 'King of Gaudy,' Parsons replies, "Ninety percent of the stuff I like has big flowers, and any color is okay as long as it's red!"

Jerry is also the person we can thank for developing a new Texas bluebonnet color palette, including *Barbara Bush Lavender, Abbott Pink* and *Texas Maroon* – and for developing the Texas state flower into a bedding plant, which spurred what is now a multi-million-dollar industry.

Parsons is known for his generosity in sharing his tremendous range of scientific knowledge about everything from ornamental plants and landscaping to vegetable and fruit production, 'free of charge.' A prime example is his early adoption and extensive use of the Web as a tool for giving others access to his sprawling library of information. His three Web sites, *AggieHorticulture/PLANTanswers, PLANTanswers.com, and PLANTanswersTV*, are loaded with useful, frequently updated information (*including family recipes!*) and are among the most widely used sources of horticultural information in the world.

As *Texas Gardener* observed in a recent article, "If the past is any indicator, you can count on this unorthodox horticulturist to think outside the flower box, to stir up controversy, agitate his friends and colleagues and delight scores of home gardeners with outstanding plant materials and his unique form of edutainment. That's 'pure Parsons.'"

*\*Since Jerry's retirement, all the above information (and more) can now be found at: [www.PLANTanswers.com](http://www.PLANTanswers.com) \**