

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham
The “Neglected” Shrub

A casual glance into the fields or pastures around the Bell County area will reveal numerous sightings of *Baccharis neglecta*, a multi-stemmed, 5 to 9 foot tall spreading shrub belonging to the Asteraceae (Sunflower) family. The genus name *Baccharis* is a Greek name given to a plant with a fragrant root. The species name, *neglecta*, is a Latin word meaning “overlooked”, “disregarded”, “slighted”. This “overlooked” plant is actually being used as a specimen planting in several yards in the Killeen/Harker Heights area. When the rains return, the entire shrub will be covered in white flowers. The male and female flowers are borne on separate plants with the female plants producing a profusion of dense, fuzzy, white flowers heads.

Several common names for this plant refer to the Oklahoma/Texas Panhandle Dust Bowl and Depression period of the 1930s and to Roosevelt’s presidency. *Baccharis neglecta* was eventually planted in the fields as a fast and easy way to rejuvenate the severely damaged soil. Therefore, common names for the shrub are **Roosevelt Weed**, **New Deal Weed**, and **Poverty Weed**. Additional common names are **False-willow** (the leaves resemble willow leaves), **Groundsel**, and **Jara Dulce**, a reference to the shrub’s sweet root.

Baccharis neglecta has several positive qualities: 1. Adapts well to numerous soil types, 2. Rehabilitates damaged, worn-out soil, 3. Tolerates high salt levels in the soil making it an ideal plant for sea shore plantings to reduce beach erosion, 4. Performs well in specimen plantings, as a screen or background plant, and in neglected sites such as along roadsides, median strips, and in parking lots. On the negative side, *Baccharis neglecta* has become an aggressive invader of rangelands and disturbed sites. Its seeds are prolifically produced, the roots are deep and use up a disproportionate amount of water, and the plant is extremely flammable. Because livestock avoid eating it, the shrub may eventually take over an abandoned pasture.

Although you may never plant Roosevelt Weed in your yard, give it a nod and call it by name the next time you see it in abandoned places. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

