



What's Growing On?

BASTROP COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

May 2019

Wildflowers of Spring

by

Howard Nemerov

On April 11, I decided to inventory some of the recent changes to my garden. As I move the landscape towards natives and Superstars®, the question arises, will plants like these make a similar “statement” as allegedly prettier—but non-native—plants we find at most nurseries?

[Salvia greggii](#)'s common name, Autumn Sage, may be a misnomer, because Spring is arguably its best flower show. It's been flowering reliably since late March. I planted this into the xeriscape last year, as you can see from its placement between an Agave and a Hesperaloe,



both xeric plants known for their heat and drought tolerance. *Salvia greggii* coexists on this southeast street corner which absorbs summer sunlight all day. Including this shrub adds a finer,

leafy texture—and color—often lacking in a more traditional xeriscape of fleshy leaves and spines. While attracting hummingbirds and honeybees, I also watch native bumblebees hovering around, sometimes sipping but mostly chasing away other bumblebees from “their” plant.

Salvia greggii has been hybridized to produce many other flower colors. In my experience, many are not as hardy or prolific, and have

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Attract Migrating Birds With Only Your Green Thumb

Spring has sprung and with it comes migration season! Adding native plants to a garden, balcony, or green space can help attract and provide food and shelter for your favorite birds. We've made it easy to find the best plants for your seasonal and year-round birds. Check the [database](#)

Enter your 5-digit zip code to use Audubon's native plants database and explore the best plants for birds in your area, as well as local resources and links to more information. By entering your email address, you'll receive an emailed list of the native plants you've selected, get additional tips on creating your bird-friendly habitat, and help us keep track of your contributions to our efforts to get 1 million native plants for birds in the ground.

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Wow, check out the huge artichoke in the Extension Office vegetable garden.



Marcia Erickson caught these Black Swallow-tail (*Papilio polyxenes*) caterpillars happily chowing down on the fennel in bed 1 at Bastrop Community Gardens. Google search for “fennel as host plant for butterflies” to learn what a great plant it is for their entire life cycle.

Upcoming opportunities for Advanced Master Gardener Training

- May 16–18, 2019—**Earth-Kind®**
Henderson County, in Athens, TX
 - May 20–21, 2019—**First Detector #2**
Williamson County, in Georgetown, TX
 - May 23–24, 2019—**Turfgrass**
Montgomery County, in Conroe, TX
 - June 12–14, 2019—**Tree Care**
Hill Country, in Kerrville, TX
 - October 17–19, 2019—**Greenhouse Management**
Tarrant County, in Fort Worth, TX
- Save the Dates!
- August 13–15, 2019 **Vegetables**
Bexar County, in San Antonio, TX
 - September 24–26 2019 **JMG®**
Denton County, in Corinth, TX

For additional details visit: <https://txmg.org/master-gardener-training/training10/training5/specialist>



Upcoming Events

- **May 4**
Information session in Bastrop — About the Fall 2019 BCMG Training Class
May 4 @ 10:00 am – 11:00 am
Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Bastrop
- **May 13**
Lunch and Learn — Wildscape Gardening
May 13 @ 11:30 am – 12:30 pm
First National Bank of Bastrop, Smithville
- **May 31**
African Violet National Show and Sale
May 31 @ 9:00 am – June 1 @ 3:00 pm
Houston Marriott Westchase
- **Jun 08**
Information session in Smithville — About the Fall 2019 BCMG Training Class
June 8 @ 10:00 am – 11:00 am
First National Bank of Bastrop, Smithville
- **Jun 10**
Lunch and Learn — Rose Propagation
June 10 @ 11:30 am – 12:30 pm
First National Bank of Bastrop, Smithville
- **Jun 22**
Information session in Elgin — About the Fall 2019 BCMG Training Class
June 22 @ 10:00 am – 11:00 am
Elgin Public Library
- **Jul 20**
Information session in Bastrop — About the Fall 2019 BCMG Training Class
July 20 @ 10:00 am – 11:00 am
Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative
- **Aug 3**
BCMGA Master Gardener Classes Begin August 3rd
August 3 @ 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Please check out website for full details.

<https://txmg.org/bastropcounty/>
And like us on [Facebook](#)

Victory Gardens: Winning Wars with Medicinal Dirt

by
Cary Lam



The ability to grow something from nothing is a skill that can win wars and feed the hungry. But something else happened in these gardens. The gardeners who were pulling the weeds, hoeing the rows and mounding the potatoes felt different. They felt good because they were fighting the war, sustaining themselves—and they felt good because dirt acts as a proven mood elevator.

In 1917, Woodrow Wilson declared, “Food will win the war.” He was talking about WWI. America was feeding most of the world. It was the same story a generation later. For the average American in World War II, the Victory Garden was a practical way to contribute to the war effort. Some 20 million Victory Gardens were planted, and by 1943, these little plots produced 40 percent of all vegetables consumed in the US. It’s estimated that 8–9 million tons of food were grown.

The Need for Victory Gardens

Wartime needs stretched agricultural production. The United States not only had to feed its own civilian and military population, but many of the Allies relied on America’s bread basket. In addition, U-boats sank hundreds of food-laden ships bound for Britain.

Canned fruits and vegetables were rationed starting 1943, so civilians were encouraged to grow their own produce to supplement their rations. The use of fewer canned goods would decrease the use of precious tin and reduce the strain on the heavily taxed rail and road systems.

The Victory Garden Program

In December 1941, shortly after the United States entered World War II, the US Agriculture Secretary began promoting Victory Gardens. The Department of Agriculture produced pamphlets to guide urban and suburban gardeners, magazines and newspapers published helpful articles, and patriotic posters urged participation.

Neighborhood and community committees were formed with veteran gardeners guiding newcomers. These committees also helped with distribution of surplus food and sharing of equipment. Many garden tools were made of steel,

which was in short supply, so sharing between families was encouraged.

Where Were Gardens Grown?

Victory Gardens sprang up on farms, in backyards, and on city rooftops. Even some window boxes were converted from flowers to vegetables. Communal gardens were planted in parks and vacant lots and baseball fields. War materiel manufacturing plants often planted gardens on their properties for use in company cafeterias, and schoolyard gardens provided fresh vegetables for school lunches.

DIY Victory Garden

The average small town or city dweller knew little about gardening. Pamphlets provided sample planting schedules and garden plans to show the newcomer how to grow enough to feed his family for a year without wasting seed or food. These pamphlets described how to choose the garden site, prepare the soil, fertilize, plant properly, weed, and harvest. The Department of Agriculture and the War Production Board prepared a special Victory Garden fertilizer for home use.

Food Preservation

The ideal Victory Garden produced fresh vegetables in season with plenty to preserve for winter. Women’s magazines published articles about how to can, store, dry, pickle, and freeze the bounty. People were encouraged to share their surplus with others in their neighborhoods.

Is Dirt Like Medicine?

Nature’s “antidepressant” is found in a dirt-bound bacteria, and it can lead to feelings of calm, happiness and relaxation. Twelve years ago, the psychological effects of *Mycobacterium vaccae* were discovered by a doctor treating lung-cancer patients. *M. vaccae* thrives in typical backyard garden environments or anywhere soil is enriched with organic matter. This tiny microorganism is a living creature that acts like a drug once it enters the human body. It has been shown to boost the levels of serotonin and norepinephrine circulating in the systems of humans and mice. The good news, you don’t have to feel the effect by eating it, just simply breathe in the smell of good dirt or compost. It functions like supplements to boost your mood. Who knew?

Victory Gardens in World War II were more than a way to increase morale. They produced a significant amount of healthy food, allowing agricultural produce to be used for the military and the Allies, and reducing the use of tin and transportation. Despite rationing, the average American ate better during the war than before. The Victory Garden was part of the reason. Feeling blue on a rainy day—go smell some good dirt!

Sources:

Richard R. Lingeman, Don’t You Know There’s a War on? *The American Home Front 1941–1945*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1970.

Andy Snyder, *The Secret Way America Won WWII*, Manward Press, February, 2019.

Sarah Sundan, *The Victory Garden in WWII*, 2017. <http://sonomamg.ucanr.edu>.

Kennedy Kagan, “How to Get High On Soil,” *The Atlantic*, Jan. 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com.health/archive/2012/01/how-to-get-high-on-soil/251935>.

Note from

Cary.

Discovered this topic and was so fascinated by the subject, I found myself writing the attached article.

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faded from my landscape. One that has withstood the test of time—and benign neglect—is this coral-colored selection that has thrived under Pecan shade near a south-facing street. Another red variant resides on the other side of the Pecan, just barely visible in the background.

Also in the xeriscape, a few feet from the red *Salvia greggii*, [Wedelia acapulcensis var. hispida](#) (*Zexmexia*) settled into the same hot corner (notice *Salvia greggii* in upper right corner). Planted last year from a

#1 pot, it returned this spring for another go at our summer weather. Heat and drought tolerant, it produces yellow flowers from May through November, until first frost. This one opened flowers by mid-April, with many buds preparing to open. While Lady Bird says it can be a larval host plant for a number of butterflies, I've only seen a few sipping nectar. As with other yellow-flowered plants, it attracts honeybees and beneficial insects.



Just a few feet farther down the front of the xeriscape, I'm trialing [Agastache cana](#), a rare West Texas native. I received seed from a Seed Savers Exchange member from Wyoming, started

seed in February 2018, and grew them into #1 specimens over the summer. They flowered by May 2018, and [Gray Hairstreak](#) butterflies (*Strymon melinus*) sipped on their tubular pink flowers. I planted them into the xeriscape last October, and they're flowering again.



[Salvia farinacea 'Henry Duelberg'](#) (Henry Duelberg Mealycup Sage) is a native sport found in an East Texas cemetery by horticulturist and AgriLife associate Greg Grant. Also planted into the xeriscape last year, it's the first to flower this year of all my Duelberg plantings. Here it's tucked between two *Helianthus annuus*, our native annual sunflower and another xeric plant. This spot faces south along the road, receiving reflected sunlight all afternoon.

Before installing this xeriscape, I checked temperatures one summer afternoon. It was 20° cooler just a few feet back, beneath the Pecan tree, with the xeriscape well over 100°. It's interesting to note that at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's spring plant sale, Henry Duelberg was the *Salvia farinacea* variety they sold, indicating their acceptance that this is indeed a Texas native.



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Just a bit farther down, on the backside of the xeriscape, [Nemophila phacelioides](#) (Texas Baby Blue Eyes) sprang up a couple years ago, hiding from the sun behind two Hesperaloes. I often see bees visiting the flowers. This plant usually goes dormant as summer's heat arrives, making this an ephemeral spring beauty. Since it volunteered and gets larger each spring, it's clearly Bastrop hardy and worth considering for a shadier area, to provide early season nectar for honeybees and butterflies.

At the other end of the xeriscape I planted [Verbescina encelioides](#) (Cowpen Daisy), an annual that Lady Bird says is heat and drought tolerant. Plants started inside during the winter have already flowered and produced new seed. This wildflower is particularly interesting because I've seen visits by [Syrphid Flies](#), which eat thrips, aphids, and other insects that chew on my tomatoes. Now I know this, I will start many more Cowpen Daisies for planting near the tomato beds, in hopes of reducing the need for Spinosad and Safers Insecticidal Soap. As prolific seed producers—I have to deadhead all except one flower at a time to keep these plants from blooming themselves into exhaustion—it's the difference between a few dollars of growing mix and lights versus over \$100 for a season's worth of organic insect control. Honey bees also like this plant. With an alleged blooming season of April through October, Cowpen Daisy may be one of the few nectar plants for bees during our exciting summer weather. Since this is the first trial year, we'll need to see if it lives up to its reputation.



I found the perfect location for [Penstemon tenuis](#) (Brazos Penstemon). Lady Bird's native plant database says it likes moister soil and tolerates part shade, so I planted it next to the air conditioning drain next to the house—which keeps this area moist—beneath the eaves and Pecans to get filtered light most of the day, with a very short period of full sun in the afternoon. Just planted as a #1 sized-plant month ago, it's already flowering. Lady Bird says it's a nectar source for bees, beneficial insects, and butterflies; I've yet to see visitors, but it's tucked into an out-of-the-way spot that I don't usually view.

Walking just outside of town last spring, we found a country road lined for over 100 yards on both sides with [Englemannia peristenia](#) (Engelmann's Daisy), all the proof I needed that this is a Bastrop hardy, low-maintenance plant. I spot-harvested seed from numerous plants and began propagating it for this year's trials. Its cheery yellow flowers get visited by honeybees, butterflies, and beneficial insects surviving on nectar while waiting for prey insect populations—bugs that eat your plants—to build up as weather warms. I bought this #1 plant at Lady Bird's 2018 fall sale, planting it when I got home. It established itself right away and began blooming in late January 2019 when high temperatures averaged over 60° and we had a frost-break.



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Of course, there's always Texas Bluebonnets ([Lupinus texensis](#)). They've naturalized in this bed and surround Engelmann's Daisy, also providing early season nectar for honeybees.

Whether your goal is to keep bees or reduce spraying by attract beneficial insects to your garden, native annuals and perennials provide long-term benefits. Once established, native annuals reseed themselves, just as they've done long before humans arrived. Perennials return each spring and may even spread over time, providing large stands that attract more pollinators, or to divide and spread around your landscape or share amongst friends. Natives are well-adapted to our area, creating a garden that's low-maintenance, beautiful, and a boon to our insect friends.

Newsletter Contributions

This newsletter contains two great articles written by members Howard Nemerov and Cary Lam. Their contributions are so appreciated. We are always looking for content suggestions and articles. If you have something of interest to share, please contact Brenda Posh email:newsbcmga@gmail.com