

## BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

### Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

#### "Artemisia, Named for a Goddess"

Although the herb "Artemisia" is named for the Greek goddess Artemis, the Lady of Wild Things, the common names for this herb "wormwood" and "sage bush" are less enchanting. This member of the Asteraceae (Sunflower/Daisy) family has long been in use in the world of medicine to treat a variety of complaints from liver and gall bladder problems to gout. It was also popular as an aid to digestion and as a vermifuge, an agent that expels or destroys intestinal worms. Once used as an ingredient in the liqueur Absenthe, today the plant is considered highly toxic and no part should be ingested. However, the crushed leaves of several species make a good natural insect repellent and can be placed in pillows to ease insomnia. The dried silver-grey foliage of several species is also lovely in floral arrangements, wreaths, and swags.

Artemisia is an easy-care perennial shrub with silvery-gray to silver-green foliage, depending on the species. This hardy plant prefers sun and dry, well-drained soil. Some varieties are suitable for container planting. The larger varieties can grow to 4 feet tall and can spread as much as 4 feet wide. Most varieties require some pruning to keep them from becoming "leggy".

Common Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) is an extremely aromatic foliage plant. The silver leaf color of the young plant ages to pale green. Yellow/green flowers are produced in mid summer; however, the foliage is the most attractive feature of this plant. This best-known member of the Artemisia family was an important medicinal plant and was the one used as an ingredient in the Absenthe liqueur.

Southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*), also commonly known as "Lover's Plant", Maiden's Ruin", and "Old Man" was once used as a love charm. The gray-green foliage is thread-like, soft and feathery. If you brush against the foliage with your hand, it releases a pungent, tangerine fragrance, although some say it smells like camphor.

Silver King (*Artemisia albulula*) has fine cut, lacy silver leaves. It is commonly known as the "Ghost Plant". This winter-hardy wormwood is very popular for use in wreaths or other types of floral arrangements. The dried silvery branches do not shatter after drying.

This hardy, attractive, undemanding plant will be a rewarding addition to your garden. Try planting some for the wonderful unique color it adds to your garden! Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact

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