

Bell County Master Gardeners  
Tip of the Week  
By Frances Idoux  
Three Tough Plants for Texas Summers

Although he managed to convince Brer Fox otherwise, Brer Rabbit, that memorable character created by writer Joel Chandler Harris, was at home in the brier patch. Fortunately, there are some garden favorites that are at home in the brier patch of scorching heat and scarce rainfall, common challenges of Texas summers. As an added attraction, they provide a choice of vibrant colors when other flowers have decided to wait for more favorable conditions.

Although not native here, three plants that are at home in Texas summers are lantana, verbena, and yarrow -- all perennials that are dormant in winter, but return to bloom in spring and summer.

Both the plants commonly called lantana and verbena are part of the verbena family, Verbenaceae. However, they are different plant genera, each with many various species. Plants in this family do share some common traits, especially flower-spike clusters in a wide range of colors.

Both lantana and verbena bloom best in full sun, but can manage in partial shade, and both attract butterflies and hummingbirds to the garden. Varieties of lantana will bloom through summer heat until the first frost, and some types of verbena also have an equally long time in bloom. Homestead Verbena Canadensis, "Homestead Purple," has the longest growing season, from spring until fall, and Blue Princess Verbena, *Verbena x hybrida* Blue Princess, has earned the designation of Texas Superstar, given by Texas A&M to plants tested to be both durable and attractive.

The white variety of yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*, was brought to the United States by early colonists and used medicinally to wrap wounds, but it is no longer considered to have any medical value. Hybrid varieties now offer a wide range of colors -- yellow, gold, pink, rose, red, and mixed. All flourish in full sun, and add a garden asset with their evergreen fern-like foliage.

Lantana, verbena, and yarrow are tough plants, suited to withstand Texas summers. They need proper planting, initial care, and adequate water to develop a root system to become established. After that, they are as resilient as another famous bunny -- they can take a licking but keep on ticking!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact

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Bell County master gardeners are taking applications for the next class starting January 2013. Applications can be downloaded from the website or picked up at the AgriLife Extension Office, 1605 North Main, Belton, Texas. [254-933-5305](tel:254-933-5305).

The all-inclusive fee is \$250.