

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
"Shady Flower Garden"

Q: I want to plant a flower garden in a mostly shady area. I am new to Bell County; what advice can you give me?

All gardening begins with the soil. Whether you have the thin, alkaline, clay soil of west Bell County or the heavy, deep clay, alkaline soil of east Bell County, you may want to create raised beds or berms to plant. Raised beds and/or berms will allow you to have the 8-10 inches of soil most plants require. Amend the soil with organic material such as cottonseed hull, peat moss, pine bark mulch, and fallen leaves. Your plants will do best with a 50/50 ratio of native soil to organic matter. If you also add decomposed granite or expanded shale, which provides a loose, well-drained soil the plants, will thrive. In addition to aerating the soil, decomposed granite will provide minerals to the plants.

You may to plant a mix of annuals (plants that last one season) and perennials to allow for a constant floral display. Also, you can and should include plants noted for structure and texture, like Inland Sea Oats, ferns, hosta, Cast Iron plant, lirioppe and Bamboo Muhly, or colorful leaf plants like coleus. Examine the plant label and buy shade, part/shade plants. Dianthus, snapdragons and petunias can be planted now and, if watered consistently, will perform year-round. Perennial plants that do well in part shade are penstemon, chili pequin, bicolor iris, iris, purple oxalis, cedar sage, Katie dwarf ruellia, sedum, columbine (blooms only in spring), Texas Betany, beebalm (Monarda), yarrow, Zexmenia and Turk's Cap. Annuals such as impatiens, nicotiana, and wax begonia also do well.

After planting, use drip irrigation in beds and apply 3 inches of native mulch. You shouldn't have to worry about fertilizer if you have amended your soil with plenty of organic matter.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

Bell County Master Gardeners' spring plant sale is Sat. March 24, 7:30, AM to 1PM. There will be demonstration booths on Firewise Landscaping, Bee Keeping, Tool Sharpening, Composting, Rainwater Harvesting, Rose Propagation, also Kids Kamp gardening project

In the photo: Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) a perennial herb with grey or green fern-like aromatic foliage. Its flat flower heads provide a secure landing area for butterflies and comes colors of white, yellow, gold, pink or red. It is available in tall and compact varieties.

