

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
“Deer Driven Gardening”

Many in Central Texas have two concerns when selecting plants for their landscape- Is this plant deer resistant? Is this plant drought tolerant? Other concerns, particularly in western Bell County, are the lack of topsoil, constant wind, and little time for garden maintenance. Native plants can survive deer, drought, many grow naturally in caliche, and they can survive neglect.

Native plants must have good drainage; an exception to this is the *Rudebeckia Maxima* or Giant Coneflower. This plant is found in the wild in moist places like bar-ditches. It has gray-green foliage year round and has yellow cone-shaped blossoms on stems reaching 3-6 feet. If you live in the blackland areas you may want to plant your native plants on berms or in raised beds amended with decomposed granite to ensure good drainage. If you have shallow soil, berms and raised beds are a good solution for you as well.

Perennials usually safe around deer are lamb's ear, society garlic, skeletonleaf goldeneye, yellow bells, white mistflower, Gregg's Blue Mist, Texas Betany, calylophus, Mealy Blue Sage, pink skullcap, *Salvia Greggii*, columbine, and *Zexmenia*. These perennials will provide rotating color starting in March with the columbines and going until frost with the salvias. All the muhly grasses (Gulf Muhly, Deer Muhly, Pine Muhly Big Muhly Bamboo Muhly), and Mexican Feather Grass are deer safe and provide year round interest. Deer resistant shrubs are Dwarf Youpan Holly, American Beautyberry, dwarf babados cherry, lavender, rosemary, Gray Bush Germander, Flowering Senna, *Thyralis*, and *Aloisia*.

Provide water for your newly planted native plant for the first year to help it get established. After the first year, water it in times of drought. Drip irrigation is the preferred watering method and mulch is a must. Mulch will conserve moisture, reduce weeds and regulate soil temperature. Mulch can be organic or even types of rock, such as river rock.

There will be a free Vegetable Growing Seminar given by Master Gardeners on August 2 at the Bell County Extension office. The seminar is open to the public and you are asked to call and reserve a seat to ensure you will get the handouts. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

In the photo: The native *Rudebeckia Maxima* is drought tolerant even though it is found in moist, low areas. Its gray-green leaves are evergreen. It has 3-6 stems with coneflower shaped yellow blooms. It is deer resistant.

