

## BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

"Getting to Know Black-eyed Susan"

The Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta* L. (also called "Brown-eyed Susan") is perhaps the most common of all American wildflowers. This self-seeding biennial is a member of the Asteraceae family, the sunflower family. It is easily grown from seeds or transplants, attracts butterflies, is deer resistant, enjoys a sunny location, and most species thrive in a variety of soils, even clay. However, the *Rudbeckia hirta* prefers lighter soils to clay. The flowers can reach a height of three feet, and the cut flowers have a vase life of 8 to 10 days.

The common names "Black-eyed Susan" or "Brown-eyed Susan" are a reference to the dark brown disk flower clump that rises about an inch above the yellow petals. My research did not reveal why the name "Susan" was chosen. The yellow ray flowers are droopy and sometimes have a red-brown spot at the base. Rough, spreading hairs cover the stems and leaves. The scientific term *hirta* means "hairy". The genus name *Rudbeckia* is a reference to Olaus Olai Rudbeck (1660-1740), a Swedish physician.

The Indians used the juice from the roots of this flower to relieve earache. The plant may also be used for dyeing, producing greenish and yellowish colors, and for making tea.

The Black-eyed Susan wildflower is the state flower of Maryland. Although it is not native to the state, it does grow there in profusion. The flower also reflects the colors black and gold that the first Lord Baltimore used in his coat of arms.

I planted six Black-eyed Susan transplants in my Butterfly Garden in spring 2008. They more than fulfilled their promise of attracting butterflies and other nectar-seeking creatures. But what a surprise this past spring, when the self-seeding abilities of this colorful plant resulted in more than a hundred additional "Susans"—most of them growing outside the boundaries of the flower bed. Some botanists might classify *Rudbeckia hirta* as an invasive plant—a negative characteristic, but I say these colorful flowers may brighten my garden and lawn wherever they choose to live. See picture below I am sure you will agree! Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact [askbcmga@gmail.com](mailto:askbcmga@gmail.com)

