

## Go Native

by Ursula Nanna, Bell County Master Gardener

Fall is definitely an excellent time to introduce new plants to your garden. You can evaluate what grew well through our hot, dry summer and fill in the spaces left by those plants that didn't make it. Consider Native Texas plants when you are filling in the empty spots.

Native Texas plants are those which are adapted to our climate and soil and have lived in the wild for hundreds of years. They are also an excellent choice when gardening to attract wildlife to your yard. Native Texas plants can be perennial, biannual, or annual. Perennials are those plants which will live three years or more under normal conditions - but not necessarily forever. There are plants, shrubs, trees and vines from which to choose.

In Central Texas, our hardiness zone is 8; 8a to be specific. This refers to a plants. ability to withstand the winter temperatures in our zone. So, look for plants hardy in zone 8(a).

Before choosing any plant, assess what your garden site has to offer: sun; shade; dappled shade; morning sun; afternoon sun; wet; or dry soil. Is the soil sandy or caliche clay? Make a list of these areas and amend the sandy or caliche soil with composted organic matter. THEN, go look for plants.

A certified Texas nursery person, at reputable nurseries, will be an asset in answering your questions and guiding you in your plant choices.

Remember to place taller plants to the back of a bed or in the center of an island garden; shorter plants to the front. This way, as a plant matures, it will not be hidden by the taller plants. Remember, plants have a mature width as well as height. Consider this when spacing plants. The garden may look sparse, at first, but this will save the work of later digging out overcrowded plants.

Bloom time is also a consideration. A garden full of spring bloomers will make a dull summer and fall appearance. Native plants offer a variety of bloom times from January to November. This will give you color and diversity all season long.

Some Texas Natives can spread rapidly in your garden. They can be so prolific that they can be thought of as invasive to your other plantings. If this kind of behavior bothers you, be sure to ask about growth and spreading habits when selecting a plant you are not familiar with. Better to not plant it than to spend the next several years pulling up its offspring.

Below are a few mainstay plants, but there are over 500 Native Texas plants from which to choose, many suited to our hardiness zone. Try out a few and expand your collection as you grow to love our Texas Natives.

**SUN PERENNIALS:** Butterfly Bush; Calylophus; Coreopsis; Purple Cone Flower; Flame Acanthus; Artemesia 'Powis Castle'; Texas Aster; Guara; Oxeye Daisy; Skull Cap; Texas Lantana; Rock Rose; Salvia Greggii; Reullia; Upright Germander; and, Yarrow

**SHADE PERENNIALS:** American Beauty Berry; Cast Iron Plant; Texas Columbine; Coral Bells; Wood Fern; Island Sea Oats; Oxalis; Pigeonberry; Lyre-leaf Sage; Belize Sage; Turk's Cap; Zexmania.

With the large array of plant choices, your pleasure will be heightened with an increase in native wildlife instinctively drawn to the native plants. Get to know our Natives but be careful, the experience can be addicting!