

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

“India Mustard: A Useful Wildflower”

One of our earliest blooming “wildflowers” is the herb *Brassica juncea*, a member of the Cabbage Family, *Brassicaceae/Cruciferae*. It thrives along roadsides, in abandoned fields, and in your yards if, like mine, there are some neglected spots. This herb, a native of Eurasia that escaped and grows profusely in North America, has several common names: India Mustard, Chinese Mustard, Leaf Mustard, Brown Mustard, and Wild Mustard. The mustards belong to the large family of Crucifers (*Cruciferae*). Its name is an allusion to the opposite pairs of petals forming a cross.

The young leaves, the seeds, and the stem of this mustard variety are edible. The plant appears in some form in African, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and “Soul Food” cuisine. The leaves are used in many Indian dishes. Brown mustard is made from the seeds. The plant seeds also yield an essential oil. In fact, mustard oil is one of the major edible oils in India.

Vegetable growers sometimes grow mustard as a “green manure.” Its main purpose is to act as a mulch by covering the soil to suppress weeds between crops. When used for this purpose, the mustard plants are cut down at the base when fully grown and left to wither on the ground surface, continuing to act as a mulch until the next crop is due for sowing and the mustard is then dug in.

India Mustard is also used as a folk remedy for arthritis, foot ache, lumbago and rheumatism (Duke and Wain,1981). When the leaves are applied to the forehead they are said to relieve headache. (Burkill,1966). In Korea, the seeds are used for abscesses, colds, lumbago, rheumatism, and stomach disorders. The Chinese eat the leaves in soups for bladder inflammation or hemorrhage.

All in all, this early blooming “wildflower” is worth a second look and a nod of appreciation. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

