

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER
Tip of the Week
By Beverly Wickersham
“Getting to Know Our Roadside Wildflowers”
Second in a Series

MEXICAN HAT (left side of picture)

Ratibida columnifera

Asteraceae (Sunflower Family)

Mexican Hat is an easily identified wildflower. Its “sombrero,” an elongated disk sometimes two inches high, sets it apart from the other coneflowers. The drooping velvety petals vary from all yellow to all red-brown to assorted mixtures of red-brown painted on a yellow petal. Long cultivated in the gardens of Europe, the Mexican hat rightfully deserves a place in Texas plantings. The flowers are produced, often in profusion, from May to July, and even later if there is plenty of water and if the old heads are picked off.

PURPLE HORSEMINT or LEMON BEE BALM (middle of picture)

Monarda citriodora

Lamiaceae (Mint Family)

Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist who in the mid-eighteenth century designed a system for classifying and naming plants, animals, and minerals that is still used today, named the genus *monarda* in honor of Nicolas Monardes, an early Spanish writer on medicinal plants. The species name, *citriodora*, is from the Latin *citrus* meaning “lemon tree,” and *odoro* “having a fragrant smell.” The entire plant has a noticeable fragrance of lemon. The plant’s volatile oil, citronellal, is used in perfumes and insect repellents. However, simply crushing the leaves (especially the dried ones) and rubbing them on your body repels most insects.

FIREWHEEL or INDIAN BLANKET (right side of picture)

Gaillardia pulchella

Asteraceae (Sunflower Family)

This colorful flower begins blooming in mid-April and peaks in May, producing massive displays of color in fields and along roadsides throughout Central Texas. Firewheel is easily grown from seed and thrives in the poor soils of our area.

The long-lasting cut flowers are ideal for arrangements. In the North and East Firewheel is cultivated and sold in flower shops. The genus is named for Gaillard De Marentonneau, an 18th century French patron of botany. The species name, *pulchella*, means beautiful or handsome.

