

Somervell County Master Gardeners

THE GREEN PIECE

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



July 2011

July 2011 Tips

by Donna Hagar, Somervell County Master Gardener

Yes, it is hot and dry! Crispy, crunchy might be better words. But there are some things we, as homeowners, can do to help protect our landscapes and treasured plants during this extended drought period.

Begin with mulch, mulch, mulch. Hopefully you already have a good 4 inch layer of mulch on all of your landscape beds. If not, add more! This keeps not only the moisture in the ground, but helps keep the soil temperatures down as well.

Make sure you are mowing your turfgrass lawn at the proper heights. This time of year, mow at the highest setting for your type of grass. The additional height helps the grass act as a living mulch, holding in moisture and keeping soil temperature down.

Some of the best information can be found on the Aggie Horticulture website. Start [here](#) to watch a brief video and get some basic information. Or go directly to the [Earth-Kind® website](#) (<http://earthkind.tamu.edu/drought>) for specific tips for drought management. You may even want to bookmark this website as one of your first stops for any horticulture related questions.



Earth-Kind.

RED YUCCA

by Glenda Marsh, Somervell Coounty Master Gardener



Watch closely and you may well see a hummingbird at your blooming red yucca because its flowers are full of nectar! Requiring very little to no maintenance, this evergreen scrub has flowers that can last 30 weeks per year beginning in April and continuing through October

Got deer problems? Fortunately, those pesky deer almost never eat this plant, which lives on rainwater and can be 3 to 4 feet tall.

Red yucca is a perennial and hardy in our zone 7 as it tolerates full sun and is considered drought tolerant – just what we need in our area! It should be spaced at least 2 to 4 feet apart. Colorful coral blooms with pale yellow on the inside are the most frequent but solid yellow varieties are also available. Hummers will visit both!

Beware of a few prickly items: the plant has spines with sharp edges, so BE CAREFUL when handling it (i.e. should you want to move it). Some people may be sensitive to the plant and handling may cause skin irritation or allergic reactions and, like any plant, the pollen also may cause allergic reactions. If you have kids or grandkids, parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested. So NO snacking on this plant!



Save the seed pods and you can direct sow them outside in the fall or sow indoors before the last frost. You can also propagate them by dividing rhizomes, tubers, corms or bulbs (including offsets).

Red Yucca Seed Pods

Take a look at the red yuccas as you drive up and down Highway 67. We have some great examples of this hardy plant right in front of several of our businesses here in Glen Rose!

Good references: www.davesgarden.com Easy Gardens for North Central Texas by Steve Huddleston & Pamela Crawford

WallyWorm's Wonderful Word World
by Wade Moore, Somervell County Master Gardener

In October of Two Thousand and Nine
Wally wiggled forth with words; some common, some sublime.
He recently recalled some of the better
He was able to have published in this fine newsletter. He didn't get his kicks from Route 66 but from a
high BRIX,
Also his COMPOST pile provided him with a delicious fix.
One of his favorite words is MYCORRHIZAL,
Which when attached to fungi, is quite vital. And he didn't forget the friendly COLLEMBOLA,
Along with the NEMATODE, and an R C Cola,
They got together to make some MOLASSES
And discuss the merits of MICELLES. Never mind that he is HEMAPHRODITIC
(He had to have something to rhyme with PARAMAGNETIC.)
And he is somewhat MINERALIZED
With CALCIUM more than most realized. Now Wally may hold his pointed nose around the STINK
BUG,
And occasionally give the PILL BUG a hug;
Fortified with GOMALIN you can't stop him
From EARTHING even after the Sun grows dim. So, THANKS for abiding this ditty
And look upon Wally with eyes of pity;
For he can't seem to concentrate
On new words for the newsletter until it's too late. Wally will do his research for the next issue,
Meanwhile, just get a roll of tissue.
Have it handy; for Wally may be among The bards encased in DUNG.

June CHES Program - Backyard Chickens
By Shirley Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener



The Somervell County Master Gardeners presented a program on raising backyard chickens at the Citizens Center on Monday, June 13, at 6:30 pm. Beth Skinner of Alvarado was the guest speaker. She and her husband own Skinner's Select Poultry.

Beth's most informative program explained how chickens are becoming today's pet du jour. But, before you decide this is what you want to do, please check your city's codes and ordinances concerning keeping a farm animal in your backyard. If you decide this is for you, then one of the most important steps to take is to purchase your chickens from a state inspected farm and ask to see their NPIP certification issued by the State of Texas. Check the references of the seller and be careful about buying from unknown sellers. If you buy even one diseased chicken and take it home, you can risk losing your entire flock. If you follow these simple steps then this will insure that the birds you purchase are disease free.

Having chickens in your backyard is a great way to keep insects under control and to keep a supply of fresh eggs available. Chickens can be good companions as well as a source of good meat (if you choose to go this route). Before you run out and purchase some chickens, Beth stressed that you do your homework. Some chickens tolerate the heat better than the cold; some are calm while others are "flighty" and noisy. Chickens suffer from more diseases than any other livestock on earth. They can see in color and hear quite well, but have a poor sense of smell. A healthy chicken can live up to 10 years!

It is also important that you have housing prepared. The coop you build needs to be predator proof because snakes, raccoons, skunks, stray cats and dogs will readily make a meal of a chicken. Beth recommends using pine shavings on the floor dusted with food-grade diatomaceous earth (DE). Again, do your research and buy the proper age-appropriate feed. The feed you buy needs to be at least 18% protein to optimize egg production. They are going to need plenty of clean water and will periodically need vitamins.

Here are some websites that you find helpful:

www.skinnerselectpoultry.com

www.backyardchickens.com

www.featherfanciers.com

www.meetup.com – The Cowtown Backyard Poultry Group

Book: The Joy of Keeping Chickens by Jennifer Megysi