

*Somervell County Master Gardeners*

## ***THE GREEN PIECE***

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI LIFE**  
EXTENSION



September 2011

### **HOW TO SAVE SEEDS FROM YEAR TO YEAR**

By Bob Lancaster, Somervell County Master Gardener



If possible, leave seeds in the original container or place in an envelope or small paper bag. Be sure and label as to variety, source and date of purchase. Now place two tablespoons of powdered milk in tissue paper. Roll and fold as needed to contain the powder. Powdered milk will act as a desiccant and prevent moisture build-up in the jar.

Now place the tissue containing the powdered milk, along with the seed, in an airtight, dry glass jar and seal. Place in the refrigerator. Depending upon the type of vegetable and viability of the seed, this type of storage conditions will maintain good germination for years.

This tip comes from Dr. Sam Cotner's book, "The Vegetable Book", and is located in the Somervell County Master Gardeners' library for your use. The library is located at the Somervell County AgriLife Extension office.

## ZEXMENIA

By Becky Altobelli, Somervell County Master Gardeners

Driving back to Texas after a two-week vacation, my husband and I were speculating to what extent our home lawn and landscape would be damaged after the continuous 100+ degree temperatures and drought they had suffered through. Would there be total devastation or total annihilation of all plant species? We held out little hope of any survivors, much less any green color.

And, yes there was devastation and annihilation, but not total. There in my dry-creek bed was a large mound of dark green leaves with golden-yellow blooms. Called a “miracle plant” by some Texas gardeners, this Texas native’s name is *Zexmenia hispida* or *Wedelia texana*. “Miracle plant” because it will grow in rocky, poor, or amended soil with good drainage, sun or partial shade (leggy and lower to the ground in shade with fewer blooms) and heat, cold, and drought tolerant (the proof is in my dry-creek bed this summer).

*Zexmenia* is a 2-3 ft. semi-evergreen herbaceous shrub and hardy to Zone 7. In our zone it will freeze to the ground in winter, but return in mid-spring. The dark green leaves are rough and hairy as are the stems, lanceolate and irregularly toothed. The daisy-like orange-yellow flowers appear at the ends of bare stalks and will continue to sporadically bloom March to November in our area. You can trim back to one-half in mid-July to encourage more growth and flowering. The mound can spread to 2-3 ft. and with supplemental watering will bloom with more regularity and more profusely. Good drainage and reflective heat encourage maximum health of the *zexmenia* (note my plant is a true “miracle” this summer in the dry-creek bed surrounded by gravel).



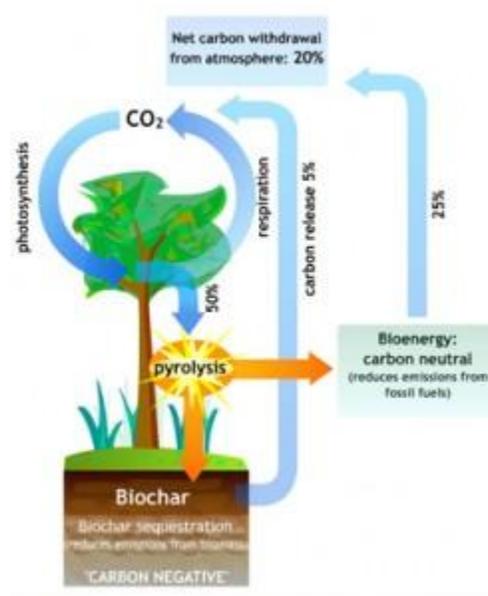
*Zexmenia* self-seeds readily from the dried flower heads, but if you want to collect the seeds yourself to use in another location in your landscape, allow the seed heads to dry in place, and re-sow where desired as soon as possible after collection for best results. An additional benefit to this Texas native is that it is a nectar and a larval plant food for butterflies, and a food source for bees and birds. Personally, I have not noticed any deer or rabbits nibbling on my *zexmenia*, but some of the scientific resource materials I researched list it as a food source for both.

I bought my *zexmenia* many springs ago at a native plant nursery and have seen it available through the years. Once you buy your transplant and give it a good home in your landscape, I know you will also find it a welcoming site in late summer when other plants have succumbed to our hot Texas weather.

## “PYROLYSIS”

“WallyWorm, not only has the hot weather been bad for most of us, the down economy has become worse. Why it has gotten so bad one big oil company is having to fire 25 congressmen.” retorts Wade

“Enough of your corn; let’s get back to our biochar discussion.” answers WallyWorm



*Biochar and Pyrolysis*

“Okay, biochar is a charcoal created by using a PYROLYSIS process. Essentially, the heating of your biomass in a low oxygen environment, causing the release of gases such as syngas and methane. This process allows the carbon to remain stable and not be dispersed into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide.” continues Wade

“Once you have produced biochar by PYROLYSIS, the biochar is incorporated into the top layer of soil, helping to prevent fertilizer runoff and leeching. Biochar retains moisture, helping plants through periods of draught more easily. It also replenishes exhausted or marginal soils with organic carbon and fosters the growth of soil microbes essential for nutrient absorption, particularly mycorrhizal fungi.” adds Wade

“PYROLYSIS, using wood as the biomass, starts occurring around 450 degrees Fahrenheit and is usually complete at temperatures close to 800 degrees Fahrenheit. Biochar retains about 50% of the carbon the biomass absorbed, as carbon dioxide, from the atmosphere. Hence, PYROLYSIS removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and sequesters it in the biochar in a virtually permanent and environmentally beneficial way.” concludes Wade

“Using biochar sure sounds like a better system than just adding organic matter to the soil. But, at the same time, that will sure cut back on my snacks.” answers WallyWorm

Information harvested from [www.biochar.info](http://www.biochar.info)

## How to Create a Flower Border Using Perennials

By Bonnah Boyd, Somervell County Master Gardener



*Spring Perennial Border*

The fall months of September to December in Texas are an ideal time to work in the garden and improve the landscape. Working outside is more pleasant. The intense heat of summer is generally past and rainfall is more common.

One way to improve the landscape is to create a flower border using perennials. Some important design concepts and guidelines to follow to produce a beautiful all-season flower border are:

- Locate a flower border in front of a fence, wall, shrub hedge, or building or along the walk leading to the front door of the house.
- Avoid creating a straight front edge to the border, unless the garden is very formal. Curved front edges, from gentle to bold and sweeping are essential. A garden hose can be used to help visualize and lay out the curves. Look at several layouts.
- Set the depth of the border at a minimum of 3 feet and expand to 8 feet or more, depending on the size of the landscape area.
- Line the border edge with steel edging, brick, or stone to give a finished edge. For a less formal look, don't use any edging material and let the border blend naturally into lawns or patios.
- Plan the plantings within the border by using drifts or clumps. Sketch the border on paper to visualize the border plantings. A drift is an elongated grouping of one species that flows through a portion of the border. A clump is a circular plant or grouping.
- Group plants in drifts or other masses in odd numbers of three to seven.

- Varying the heights throughout the border with some randomness creates more interest and visual appeal.

Selecting perennial flowers for your border is an art, with few guidelines. Some suggestions are:

- Foremost, choose plants that are locally adapted and a dependable species.
- Select perennial flowers that will thrive in the sunlight condition of the border.
- Choose flower combinations based on flower type. Combine the four type of flowers: spike (salvia), tubular (petunia), ray (daisy), and umbel (lantana).
- Choose species based on bloom period. The goal is to have blooms ebbing and flowing throughout the entire growing season. This requires some planning.
- Select perennial flowers by color. There are two types of color, warm and cool. Red, orange and yellow are warm colors. Blue, green, and purple are cool colors. Warm colors provide a sense of excitement and can make the border feel smaller. Cool colors create a sense of calm and tranquility and give the illusion of openness. White, the absence of color, can brighten a planting when used to separate competing flower colors.
- Fine-tune the border by considering foliage color and texture. Bold-textured foliage has the same effect as warm colors and fine-textured foliage has the same effect as cool colors. Consider combining different shades and textures of foliage.

These are some guidelines, not rules. Remember, you may make mistakes. Move plants around and try different combinations. The most difficult part of gardening with perennials is incorporating them into your landscape. Growing them is much easier.

SOURCES: *Doug Welsh's TEXAS GARDEN ALMANAC*

This book and other helpful materials can be found in the Somervell County Master Gardener library at the Glen Rose Extension office, located at 1405 Texas Drive. Phone: 254-897-2809

The Texas A&M website: [Aggiehorticultural.tamu.edu](http://Aggiehorticultural.tamu.edu)

## CHES Recap - Master Gardeners Present Program on Invasive Plants

by Shirley D. Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener



Monday night, August 8, 2011, the Somervell County Master Gardeners presented a program on invasive plants. Rio Brazos Master Naturalist Gary Hinds spoke to a group of 20+ folks concerning how invasive plants are harming our native habitats. Many of these non-native plants have been in America and our area for centuries, while others are recent arrivals. Early settlers brought plants with them from their native countries not realizing that many years later those same plants would be an enormous problem. Other plants have hitchhiked many, many different ways and found there was a wonderful climate in which to grow. They also adapted to a wide variety of soils and found there were few, if any, predators.

Have you ever heard of Russian thistle (the tumbleweed of West Texas), Japanese wisteria, Russian olive, bermudagrass (yep, it's an invasive), Japanese privet, Chinaberry tree, redbtip photinia, Chinese pistache, nandina (or Heavenly Bamboo), and "the plant that ate the South" – kudzu? These are just a few of the many invasives that are now a part of our landscapes and are thriving.

Invasive plants move in and, in many cases, completely take over an area by choking out the native plants. Soon, instead of there being a variety of plants growing in an area, there is only one plant (the invasive). Many, many native American plants are now extinct or very near extinction because of being crowded out by one or more of these invasives.

So, before you buy your next plant from a nursery or take a freebie from a friend, you might want to educate yourself a little about this subject. Gary had a variety of books on hand and listed below are 4 of them:

*Non-native Invasive Plants of Southern Forests*, James Miller. Free publication.

*Invasive Plants*, Dr. Sylvan Ramsey Kaufman and Wallace Kaufman, \$39.95, Stackpole Books.

*Weeds of the South*, edited by Charles T. Bryson and Michael S. Defelice. \$35.00 through Barnes and Noble

*Weeds in South Texas and Northern Mexico*, James H. Everitt, Robert I. Lonard, and Christopher R. Little, Texas Tech University Press

Additionally, here are 4 websites that can be very helpful:

[www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org)

[www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov)

[www.bugwood.org](http://www.bugwood.org)

[www.invasiveplantatlas.org](http://www.invasiveplantatlas.org)

If anyone is interested in becoming an Invasive Plant Citizen Science Monitor, there is a website for that, too:

[www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org)

Along the top, go to the "Citizen Scientist" button and go from there.

**Community Horticulture Education Series  
Monday, September, 2011, 6:30 pm  
Somervell County Citizens Center**

**Art in the Garden**

By Shirley D. Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener

Dr. Deb Tolman will be the speaker at this coming Monday night's (September 12) Community Horticulture Education Session presented by the Somervell County Master Gardeners. Her Clifton-based business, *Dr. Deb's Habitats*, is a multi-purpose business with the mission of developing sustainable approaches to landscaping, education and building practices. With more than thirty years experience, Dr. Tolman provides a wide range of services to her clients including full landscape design, self-help designs, and post-design consultation.

She is an experienced garden coach, guiding clients through their projects at their own pace and within their financial parameters. Come hear Dr. Tolman talk about what we can do to conserve water while keeping art in our gardens.

All "CHES" programs are open to the public and are held at the Citizens Center, 209 SW Barnard, in downtown Glen Rose at 6:30pm. Refreshments will be served so come join us.