

Drought Tolerant Plants

Gardening in Palo Pinto County presents quite a challenge. I was use to gardening in the metroplex where the soil and rainfall are quite different and we didn't have the added factor of deer. But I have learned what it means to garden here and what it takes to have color and variety in my landscaping. The key is choosing plants that are adapted to our area. We need plants that can take extremes in temperature, ranging from a cold 20 degrees in winter to a blistering 110 degrees in summer and plants that like the kind of soil we have which is generally rocky and a little alkaline. We also have to know whether the plant likes sun or shade or can tolerate and thrive in something in between. And last of all, is how much water does the plant need .

Since we are in a dry area and water is not plentiful, I want the ones that don't need much water -- ie, drought tolerant. There are actually many plants that fit the criteria above that are drought tolerant and grow in our county. Many are seen in the fields as wildflowers but can now be found at local nurseries. Listed below are some of my favorite perennials :

Blackfoot Daisy: A sure winner. It is a low mounding plant that blooms Spring through Fall and likes sun and very little water. It looks great with any perennial bush because it is low and spreading. It does best in full sun. (I dug mine up from friend's gravel driveway that was in full sun.) You also can plant it in partial shade / filtered sunlight and it is more sprawling but flowers are not as thick.

4 Nerve Daisy: A small ground hugging plant with yellow flowers on a six to nine inch stem. Needs full sun and is a slow grower. It is slow to grow but is a nice bright color.

Engelmann Daisy: A medium size plant with showy yellow flowers that blooms Spring and Summer.

Prairie Verbena: A small, sprawling plant with purple flowers. It is beginning to bloom in the fields now and will continue in the home garden

with just a little water. Blooms thru Fall. Combine with your cactus plants to soften their look.

Green Thread: A medium size plant with yellow flowers that bloom the whole growing season. It can be found growing wild in fields and grows well in the garden.

Mexican Hat: A colorful wildflower that is a part of the Cone family. Grows in the fields but also adapted to the garden. It has a red orange and yellow daisy type flower and blooms in late April through Fall if it gets a little water in the summer.

Zexmenia: A medium size bushy plant that blooms yellow orange flowers throughout the growing season. Prefers full sun to partial shade. A very hardy, easy to grow plant.

Mealy Blue Sage: A medium size plant that blooms beginning in late Spring until the first frost. It puts out blue spires and grows in full sun or light shade. It is a great plant to use in other combinations because of the intense blue color and upright growth. The butterflies love it.

Blue Mist: A sprawling plant that puts out many runners and grows to medium height. It has little blue flowers and is a huge magnet to butterflies. It can be invasive so give it plenty of room. It thrives in partial shade but has to have a few hours of direct sun. Blooms the entire growing season.

Greggi Salvia: A real standby in the garden. This is a medium size brushy plant that is evergreen. It bloom from Spring through Fall and comes in red, white, or red and white (commonly known as hot lips).

Turks Cap: It can grow almost anywhere from full sun to deep shade. It is a bushy plant with bright green leaves and little red flowers. It can tolerant most anything in the garden.

Copper Canyon Daisy: A large bushy plant that blooms mainly in the Fall. It is covered in yellow blooms and has an aromatic foliage which keep the deer away. This plant dies back to the ground in winter. Sometimes called a bush marigold.

Native Lantana: A very hardy plant that likes full sun and blooms all Summer and Fall. Sometimes called a calico bush because of its pink and yellow flowers. It dies back in the winter.

A WORD OF CAUTION: Drought Tolerant doesn't mean you don't have to water the plant - it just means it doesn't need much water once it is established. In the beginning water a new plant every other day for two weeks, then every four days for two weeks, then once a week for the first growing season. After that, water when needed. Remember, not to over water these plants once they are established. Mulching is the best way to conserve water in the ground. Apply several inches of organic mulch around your plant to keep out unwanted weeds and to help enrich the soil.

When you consider all the growing factors above there and you have chosen all the right plants for your garden - there is one other thing to take into account - deer. Personally, I don't grow flowers to feed the deer. No plant is totally deer resistant but there are some plants that are more resistant than others. The plants described above are generally deer resistant. Go to plantanswers.tamu.edu/publications/deer.