



## **FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...**

### Firecracker Gardening

By

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Every year at this time I wonder how my garden will survive with little rain and little relief from the firecracker-like heat. Actually, preparing a garden for this time of year starts with plant selection and water planning.

A wide variety of Texas native and adapted plants can survive and even thrive under hot and dry conditions. Some of the most heat and drought tolerant perennials for our area are salvias and sages. They offer a great variety of size and colors for our gardens. *Salvia greggii*, also known as "Autumn Sage" is a medium sized, airy shrub that comes in red, salmon, fuchsia and (my favorite) "Hot Lips" red flowers with white centers. Cenizo (Texas Sage) is a bit denser. The "Silverado" cenizo comes in dwarf or full size, with silver gray leaves and lavender flowers every time it rains. Russian Sage has tall spires of tiny lavender-colored, tubular flowers...and these are just a few salvias. Your garden center will show you many more.

Other selections are native Lantana (yellow and orange 3-5 feet tall) and smaller yellow Lantana that stays under 2 feet and can act as ground cover in the hottest of weather. Blackfoot daisy, another mounding plant with small white flowers thrives in drought. Santolina has deep green or gray mounding foliage with small yellow spring flowers and is drought and heat tolerant.

Then there are always the many varieties of cactus and grasses that provide almost care free garden accents. Various forms of Prickly Pear produce yellow flowers in the spring, while Red Yucca's red flowers grow on stalks. Agave (Century Plant) can be a garden focus. Maiden Grass, Mexican Feather Grass and the striking Gulf Muhly (blooms in the fall with pink-purple tufts that blow in the wind) add garden interest. The internet is a great source of detail descriptions and requirements. Try <http://www.txsmartscape.com/> to search the North Central Texas plant database.

Water requirements must always be considered when planning a garden. Even the most drought tolerant plants require water until established. A sensible watering guideline in absence of rain is:

- every other day for the first two weeks
- every four days for the next 4 weeks

- once a week for the rest of the year
- once every three weeks the 2nd year

It is best to group plants with similar water needs in the same area if possible. Drip irrigation can direct water to each plant individually through a system of small tubes and emitters. Kits are available at most home improvement stores. Rainwater harvesting kits (using rain barrels that collect roof runoff) include attachments for hoses and filling the watering can. Pumps are available to increase the water pressure for hose usage.

Using mulch in a garden not only lowers the temperature of soil at the root line, but conserves moisture and can offer organic material to enrich the soil. Mulch material can be either organic – bark mulch or cedar – or non-organic such as pebbles or rocks. Organic mulch will need to be replaced as it breaks down.

Considering these things when planning a garden can give the plants that extra chance to thrive, even during the hottest and driest summer months.