



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

### **TAN IS THE NEW GREEN**

By

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The evidence is everywhere that we have entered the fourth year in a drought cycle. Palo Pinto Lake lingers at only 28% of capacity. The Brazos River flows ankle deep, and Possum Kingdom Lake's water edge wafts at a record low of 65%.<sup>i</sup> It might be time to change what we think of the color green... in our landscape that is.

Let's look west for our answer. When one stands on the edge of the Trans-Pecos desert, the majestic yucca stands guard over the small prickly pear. Agave is matched only in height by the century plant. It is a beautiful mosaic of brown, fawn, tan, cream, taupe and a sprinkling of pink, yellow and green. But beige dominates. It is a perfect balance between the water available and the plant life that successfully thrives. Plant survival in the desert is determined by the rain from Texas skies and when the rain falls, the desert lights up like a fireworks display, generating lots of "oohs" and "aahs". Then it disappears back into the arid land. Maybe it is time for Texans to rebalance our expectations of a beautiful home landscape. Are we still expecting our lawns to look like AstroTurf come July and August? Do we comprehend that it takes over 50,000 gallons of clean processed drinking water a year to maintain a lawn? That equals two swimming pools worth of water! According to the EPA, nearly 30-40% of our clean water is used for landscape irrigation...over 1/3 of our precious water goes to green!<sup>ii</sup>

Our alternative is to embrace the browns. Buffalo grass is brown and fluffy in the summer. Native grasses tan themselves in the hot Texas wind. Even ornamental grasses show off beautiful beige plumes with little water. Finally, Texas Superstar plants, such as lantana burst with happy yellow heads in the hottest, driest days. Need help embracing the brown? Check out the Palo Pinto Master Gardeners' work around the county at the Vietnam Memorial Gardens in Mineral Wells and at the Palo Pinto County Courthouse and historical museum. These landscape projects prove that green can be minimized and complimented with beautiful browns.

If you have questions about conserving water and maximizing your landscape beauty, please call the Palo Pinto County Extension Office at 940-659-1228.

NOTE: Palo Pinto Master Gardeners will be having an EDUCATION DAY on Saturday, April 26. They will have speakers from the Texas Forest Service discussing Firewise Landscaping, Ways to adjust your existing landscape to protect your home from wildfire, and Plants that can enhance the beauty of your home without increasing fire hazard. There will be a registration fee.

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