

Draft 10/13/2019: Fort Bend Master Gardeners Demonstration Texas Native Garden

By Garreta Kipp, FBMG

Are you in the process of planning a new garden or refreshing an old one? Whether you are new to gardening or an “old hand,” there are certain environmental factors that should be considered to ensure a successful and rewarding gardening experience. Regional climate, local weather patterns, and soil type often come first to mind. Then come considerations specific to your location – your piece of gardening real estate! You will need to consider the soil type, drainage flow, water availability, and sun/shade exposures of your planting area.

Next comes the fun part – plant selection – and more decisions to be made! Are you interested in ground covers, taller ornamental plants or, perhaps, both? Maybe you want a mix of plants to provide a variety of colors and leaf shapes. Maybe you want to attract butterflies. Is your garden area sunny or shady, or do you have sections of both? The ultimate question is this – which plants will best survive and thrive in your garden? The answer: plants native to Texas and, more specifically, native to our region of Texas!

A native plant is one that is indigenous, or original, to a particular geographic area. Texas native plants that do well in our area thrive in local soil, can handle our humid climate, and are well-adapted to survive periods of drought. They are highly resistant to local pests and disease, have minimal water needs, and support native wildlife. If you want to plant a healthy, hardy low-maintenance garden, Texas natives are an excellent choice. They are also an excellent choice for beauty and variety. A visit to our demonstration Texas Native Garden will prove the point.

Our garden consists of two long rectangular beds, one of which is in a rather narrow sunny location that fronts our Extension Education Building (known as “The Range”), and the other is a wider bed that flanks



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a shady side of the building. These gardens dynamically demonstrate the beauty and benefits that native plants can bring to even a rather ordinary setting and they only require minimal watering – typically every third day early spring through early fall and no watering November through February. When water is needed, it is delivered through a buried drip irrigation system in our front bed; the side garden will soon be converted to the same.

Both gardens have been purposed as Waystations for the Monarch Butterfly, so you will see a focus on Texas native plants that provide bloom and cover to attract a spectacular butterfly species. As a matter of interest, the Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas Committee of the Native Plant Society of Texas recently awarded a grant to Fort Bend Master Gardeners to refurbish and expand the plant varieties in our Texas Native Demonstration Garden with an intent to “further both Monarch Butterfly conservation and education, and to promote and showcase the use of Texas native plants.”*

In the sunny garden bed you will see native perennial favorites such as Lance Leaved Coreopsis – an early-spring blooming variety with yellow/gold flowers that attract butterflies, honeybees, and hummingbirds - and Rock Rose, also a perennial, that puts forth rose-colored flowers summer through fall. You will also find Flame Acanthus, yet another perennial with a long bloom period – this one from mid-summer to first frost. The red/orange flowers of this plant are especially attractive to hummingbirds. Not to be overlooked are striking blue, nectar-laden blooms of Fall Aster which provide food for monarch butterflies from August through October. Of course, no butterfly garden would be complete without Milkweed. You will find several varieties of this butterfly garden essential in our demonstration garden.

Hardscape features used in our garden include large stones. Stones add a rustic beauty and they give functional service – when well-placed, they can demarcate glowing areas, prevent soil erosion, and serve as stable stepping-stones. Rough-hewn wooden fencing is used in our garden to add both Texas flair and to provide a sturdy and attractive backdrop for plantings. A large rainwater tank (mostly camouflaged by plantings) and a tall ornamental windmill complete the side-garden hardscape. The plants chosen for this garden bring it to life with their variety of structure, leaf shapes, shades of green, and colorful flowers. A



multi-trunked Barbados Cherry tree shades the stepping-stones that lead the visitor through a central path. Wispy stands of blooming Salvias, lower-growing White Gaura with its delicate small flowers, and the ever-popular Turk's Cap with its bright red blooms are among the more than forty varieties of plants on healthy and happy display.

We invite you to pay a visit to our gardens to glean ideas for your own! A full list of our plantings for our Texas Native Garden can be found on our website, under Demonstration gardens, Texas Gardens, Native Garden. Happy planning and planting!



*Quote from the Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas 2019 Garden Grant Program Application

Suggested resources for readers:

- [Interviews with Demonstration Texas Native Co-chairs: Mary Jones and Jessica Johnson Fbmg.org website – Demonstration Gardens, Texas Native Garden](#)
- [Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas 2019 Garden Grant Program Application submitted by FBMG Master Gardener and then-Chair of the Texas Native Garden, Natasha Stairs](#)
- [Doug Welsh's Texas Garden Almanac \(Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Service Series\) 2nd Edition by Douglas F. Welsh \(Author\), St. Romain, Aletha \(Illustrator\)](#)
- <https://www.wildflower.org/learn/guide-native-plant-gardening>
- Fort Bend Master Gardeners Demonstration Gardens
- Native Texas Plants: Landscaping Region by Region by Sally Wasowski and Andy Wasowski
- Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife, Texas A&M Nature Guides Edition (Texas A&M Nature Guides (Paperback)) New edition, The Texas A&M Nature Guides Edition by Ms. Kelly Conrad Bender (Author)
- Doug Welsh's Texas Garden Almanac (Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Service Series) 2nd Edition by Douglas F. Welsh (Author), St. Romain, Aletha (Illustrator)

Photo credits: Mary Jones, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

Research Resources

Interviews with Demonstration Texas Native Co-chairs: Mary Jones and Jessica Johnson

Fbmg.org website – Demonstration Gardens, Texas Native

Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas 2019 Garden Grant Program Application submitted by FBMG Master Gardener and then-Chair of the Texas Native Garden, Natasha Stairs

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<https://www.wildflower.org/learn/guide-native-plant-gardening>

Resources to Recommend to the Public:

FBMG.org, Demonstration Gardens

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