Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
“Create a Backyard Sanctuary for Birds”

Your landscape can be planted to attract some of the 400 species of birds found in Central Texas. Warm weather species and migrating species will be attracted to a chemical free environment and clean water. Consider planting evergreen trees and other layers of shrubs to provide nesting places for birds in your garden. Feeding birds with a bird feeder provides only 1% of its diet, insects, fruit, berries and nectar rich blooms will supply the rest. Many birds are not seedeaters and exist only on berries and insects. Native trees that produce berries, fruit and nectar can be planted in your landscape to supplement birds’ diet. This is especially important during wintertime when insects are scarce. Red Buckeye (Aesculus pavia) has bright red, nectar filled flowers that attract hummingbirds. Its fall berries provide food for wildlife, but is toxic to humans. Carolina Buckthorn (Rhamnus caroliniana) has yellow fall foliage and red berries that ripen to black. Possumhaw Holly (Ilex decidua) is a deciduous tree that resembles the evergreen Yaupon Holly (Ilex vomitoria). Both of these hollies have wintertime red berries. Since Possumhaw Holly is deciduous its red berries really stand out and it makes a dramatic landscape tree, especially when filled with Cardinals. Texas Pistachio (Pistacia texana) has white flowers and red berries. Mexican Plum (Prunus mexicana) has white flowers and edible fruit. Pomegranate (Punica granatum) has orange flowers, yellow fall color and edible fruit. Evergreen Sumac (Rhus virens) has white blooms, burgundy foliage and fuzzy red/orange berries. Flameleaf Sumac (Rhus lanceolata) has orange/red fall foliage and provides food for birds. Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum (Viburnum rufidulum) has white flowers, fall foliage, blue-black fruit for birds. Shrubs that provide food for birds are Agarita (Berberis trifoliata) with yellow flowers, red berries, Barbados Cherry (Malpighia glabra) with pale pink flowers and red berries and Turk’s Cap (Malvaviscus arboreus) with red flowers for hummingbirds and fruit for birds. American Beautyberry (Callicarpa americana) produces purple berries loved by the Mockingbird. These trees and can be grown as understory plants because they do well in shade to part-shade conditions. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com
In the photo: Yaupon Holly provides a feast for birds visiting the garden. There are many other small, understory trees available that produce fruit and berries to supplement birds’ wintertime diet.