Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
by Jann Dworsky
“Nannie Fannie and the Jack Beans”

My mother would always tell me a story from the 1930’s about her mother, Annie Lou, carrying a big bucket of water across the road to her mailbox every evening. “Nannie Fannie” had planted Jack Bean vines and didn’t want the hot summer sun to wilt the vines. The bucket was heavy, but she wanted her mailbox to look welcoming and cheerful. The Jack Beans were just the plant to achieve that look and to attract butterflies and hummingbirds as well. Many years later, my Mama would show me these vines and tell me that story about my grandmother.

One day about 10 years ago I was drooling my way through a luscious garden catalog and there they were—the beautiful Jack Beans for sale. I could not get them ordered fast enough. I planted the black and white beans and had beautiful vines, blooms, and beans all summer until frost.

These vines grow about 10 feet tall and have dark green veined leaves and purple stems. They make a quick screen to block unwanted views. The blooms are light purple, hang long, and in gracefully drooping swags. The blooms are followed by striking electric purple beans, delightful to see, and last for weeks. They are delicious when eaten small and tender.

Jack Beans are known as hyacinth beans, Egyptian pea vine, or lablab purpureus, and are also synomous with dolichos lablab. Often any store that sells seeds will have them available or consult your online seed catalog.

My grandmother did not have the advantage of plumbing inside or outside the house, or a garden hose to make taking care of her flowers easy. Yet, she had beautiful, welcoming Jack Beans. Try them yourself, you might gain a new friend! Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas?
Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com