Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
“Time to Plant a Tree”

Fall is the optimal season to add a new tree to your landscape. A tree planted in the fall has time to establish itself over the winter. When choosing a tree, consider a small native tree. Many native trees have ornamental, fragrant blooms and provide nectar, pollen, or fruit important to wildlife. Mexican Olive or Wild Olive (Anacahuite), Anacacho Orchid Tree (Bauhinia congesta), Desert Willow (Chilopsis linearis), Mexican Orchid Tree (Bauhinia mexicana), Texas Redbud (Cercis canadensis, texensis), Arroyo Sweetwood (Myrosperrnum sousanum), and Texas Kidneywood (Eysenhardtia texana) are small deciduous, drought tolerant trees with showy fragrant blooms.

Other interesting trees are Retama (Parkinsonia aculeate) with its airy foliage, yellow blooms and green trunk. Texas Persimmon (Diospyros texana) has exfoliating bark and small dark fruit. Mexican Plum (Prunus mexicana) has fruit, fall color, and interesting bark. Possumhaw Holly (Ilex decidua) has orange/red berries in winter and is a favorite of cardinals. American Smoke Tree (Cotinus obovatus) has pink plumes of smoke-like panicles in spring. Yaupon Holly (Ilex vomitoria) is evergreen and produces tiny flowers and red fall berries. Also evergreen is the Texas Mountain Laurel (Sophora secundiflora). The Mountain Laurel has purple clusters of fragrant blooms and interesting seedpods. It is slow growing but well worth the wait.

When planting a tree, make sure it is well watered before you place it in the ground and take care not to plant it any deeper than it was planted in the pot. The number one cause of tree death is planting a tree too deeply. Dig the hole wider but no deeper than the pot the tree is in. Tease and break up the roots to encourage them to spread out and not to continue to grow as if they were still in the pot. Add some compost and good soil to the hole. Water well and continue to water regularly, even in winter. It will take your new tree a year to fully be established in the landscape. Trees cleanse the environment, produce oxygen, and can be a thoughtful way to honor a special person in your life.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

In the photos: (1) White clusters of showy blooms cover the Mexican Olive Tree most of the summer. This small, native tree has oval-shaped, edible fruit. It is drought tolerant and deer resistant. (2) Dark green foliage and bright yellow blooms adorn the Flowering Senna Tree. This small native tree is drought tolerant and deer resistant.