Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
"Water Wise Gardening"

Water rationing, a rain deficit, and triple digit temperatures are resulting in stressful conditions for Bell County landscapes. Water is our most precious resource and the drought conditions we are experiencing make us appreciate this most valuable necessity to life.

Water wise landscaping or xeriscaping can reduce outside water use by one half. The word xeriscape is derived from the Greek word "xeros", which means dry, combined with landscaping results in the term xeriscaping. To xeriscape your landscape have a plan to reduce lawn areas, improve the water retention in the soil with organic material, and choose plants with low water requirements and then mulch. Mulching will reduce water evaporation, weed germination and prevent extremes in soil temperature. Most low –use water plants do well with one inch of water per week. Grasses can be the backbone of your xeriscape. They have low water requirements and they add movement, texture, structure and beauty to the landscape. Mexican Feathergrass (Stipa tenuissima), Gulf Muhly, (Muhlenbergia capillaris), Pine Muhly (Muhlenbergia dubia), Deer Muhly (Muhlenbergia rigens) are good choices. Grasses for shady areas are Inland Sea Oats (Chasmanthium latifolium) and Bamboo Muhly (Muhlenbergia capillaris).

Esperanza/Yellow Bells (Tecoma stans), Pride of Barbados (Caesalpinia pulcherrima), Salvia Greggi, Mexican Bush Sage (Salvia leucantha), and Copper Canyon Daisy (Tagetes lemmonii) are water wise perennials that will provide color and fragrance. Shrubs such as Cenizo/Texas Sage (Leucophyllum frutescens), Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis), Lavender, Flame Acanthus, (Anisacanthus quadrifidus), Cotoneaster, Bush Germander (Teucrium fruticans), Dwarf Youpon Holly (Ilex vomitoria) are also good investments for a water wise landscape.

In Texas drought is common. Use the principles of xeriscaping to have a beautiful landscape that has miserly water needs. It will benefit all of us to not waste water!

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

In the photo: Mexican Feather grass and Damianita are good choices in a water wise landscape. Mexican Feathergrass provides movement and texture and is beautiful all year. Damianita with its bright gold flowers and fragrant foliage is an evergreen perennial that is drought tolerant and deer proof.