

## **APRIL GARDEN TIPS**

By Bonna Boyd, Somervell County Master Gardener

**ANNUALS & PERENNIALS:** Plant bedding plants such as portulaca, zinnia, marigold, copper leaf, princess feather, cockscomb, coleus, periwinkle and lantana. Set out transplants of Mexican mint marigold, Mexican sage and Texas aster. Plant warm season native bunchgrasses such as Indiangrass, little bluestem, upland switchgrass, Gulf muhly, Lindheimer muhly, and Mexican feathergrass.

**FRUITS & VEGETABLES:** Thin peaches 1 to 6 inches apart and apples and pears to two fruits per cluster. Wait until fruit are marble size before thinning. Mound soil around potato plants until only about 2 inches of each plant remains visible.

**SHRUBS:** Spring and winter blooming plants can be pruned following their once-a-year spring bloom season as needed. This includes spirea, flowering quince, wisteria and once-blooming roses. Adding some fertilizer to rose bushes will help stimulate more growth and blooms. Apply a heaping tablespoon per plant of a complete fertilizer such as 6-10-4 or 8-8-8, work it into the soil and water it in well.

**LAWNS:** Apply a slow-release fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio. Wait until you have mowed your lawn twice to fertilize. After you spread the fertilizer, apply a half inch of irrigation to wash the nutrients down into the soil.

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/tips/tips-2012#April12Tips>

Favorite Plants of Master Gardeners  
Wine-Cups  
By Becky Altobelli, Somervell County Master Gardener

This spring certainly seemed to come earlier this year. With more frequent rain and in greater amounts than we have seen in North Texas for a few years, that has meant an earlier and more abundant flowering of our native wildflowers.

One of the very first to bloom, and my favorite in the fields and in my garden, is the Wine-cup of the genus *Callirhoe*. The bright magenta cup-shaped flower tops a solitary stem on deep green, ground-hugging foliage. The blooms appear (seems like overnight) as the daytime temperatures warm up. And because I have planted some, through the years, in the gravel and stone walkways around my home, those beautiful blooms reaching for the Spring sun were the first to catch my eye.

The perennial wine-cup begins to bloom a week or two earlier than annual bluebonnets and paint-brushes and continues to flower alongside them, complimenting their colors and hues beautifully throughout their shorter growing season.

If the color of the wine-cup was not enough to make it my favorite pick, here more reasons to plant this tough, long blooming perennial. It grows in hot, dry infertile soil in full sun (will tolerate semi-shade). Excellent in rock gardens, as front border plants or on a rock wall. It needs little attention throughout the year, though I usually have to trim back the stems that die in the intense and prolonged summer heat (remember summer 2011?).

I did find my wine-cups in my field close to my house and was able to transplant them successfully. Some words of caution- use only small specimens to transplant as they have an extremely long taproot in larger plants that make those difficult, if not impossible to move to another location. Once established, the wine-up will propagate by seed, and has done so through-out my yard, but is so low to the ground that it is easily mowed and blends in with the lawn.

So, for a low water-use, hardy, semi-evergreen, native perennial landscape plant with beautiful foliage and blooms look for the wine-cup in your fields or native plant nursery. Plant my favorite and Enjoy!

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/favorite-plants/favorite-plants-2012#Apr12Winecup>

## Wade's WallyWorm word

### “LYME”

“EEEK!!! a tick.” screams Wallyworm

“Well, I’ve heard ‘EEEK!!! A worm’ before, but not ‘EEK!!! a tick’-- What’s the big deal?” inquires Wade

“Man, those little critters carry bacteria that cause Lyme disease. You sure don’t want that stuff.” answers WallyWorm

“If you get bitten by a tick, you may or may not know it, and could possibly be infected with Lyme disease. A bulls-eye rash around the bite is known to be a tell-tale sign of Lyme disease, but only a red rash at the bite or no rash at all may occur. Flu-like symptoms followed by hands and feet tingling and burning, like being “asleep” are clues that you may be infected. Neck pain can occur along with headaches and a scratchy throat. Fatigue and restless sleep combined with the other symptoms make the tick a little varmint to be cautious of.” continued Wallyworm

“What do I need to do to lessen my chances of becoming a victim of the little parasites.” asks Wade

“Educate yourself about Lyme disease and if you’re in tick country, check yourself frequently and thoroughly after being outdoors. Use tick repellent on shoes and clothes. Long pants tucked into socks, long sleeve shirt tucked into pants, and a hat are good preventative measures. Soapy showers for you and laundering your clothes follow being outdoors with the ticks.

If you discover a tick latched on to you, grasp the tick with pointed tweezers as close to the skin as possible and pull straight out. Do not squeeze the ticks body if possible. Treat the tweezers and wound with alcohol. Wash your hands thoroughly. Do not burn or use any substance on the tick to get it to unlatch.” concludes WallyWorm

“Well, thanks old buddy, you may have saved me a lot of misery and several dollars; so you just keep on screaming ‘EEEK!!! A tick’.” replies Wade

Plucked straight out from an article by Janisse Ray in the August 2011 Acres USA publication

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/wallyworm-word#Apr12Lyme>

Got Ticks? Get Guineas!  
by Donna Hagar, Somervell County Master Gardener

Guineas Fowl that is! Yes, guinea fowl, though a bit odd looking and with a reputation of being a bit noisy, can nearly eliminate ticks from your property. With Wally Worms' latest dissertation on ticks and the fear of Lyme disease, I thought this would be a good time to bring guineas into the realm of a possible solution.

Guineas are busy birds, continuously on the move eating not only ticks, but mosquitoes, beetles and weed seeds. And snakes! Guineas HATE snakes and will kill any they find. They may not consume them, though, so you may stumble upon some dead ones the guineas have left for you to find. Guineas are also known as the farmers watch dogs. They have a propensity to sound a rather shrill alarm any time anything unusual comes their way. This could include coyotes, hawks, or even the occasional UPS man!

I personally have wanted guineas for many years. After learning that guineas are great at keeping snakes away, that is all it took to set my sights on learning more about these birds. One of the first books I bought when we moved to our place in the country is called "Gardening with Guineas". This book regales the wonderful virtues of raising guineas. The author, Jeanette Ferguson, began raising guineas out of a gardening necessity. She was trying to raise Flower Show quality roses but was tormented by beetles and grasshoppers. Her 14 acre farm was also infested with a large tick population. She had chickens but decided to give guineas a try to help with the pest population. And it worked! She has since won many awards for her prize flowers and is virtually tick free!

Not being entirely comfortable with some of the nuances of raising poultry of any kind, I had to spend quite a bit of time researching and planning. I decided I wanted to raise chickens and guineas together. So, I just recently completed a fairly elaborate chicken coop and now have my first chicks. I have 5 guineas on order and I will get them as day old "keets" in mid May.

We have not had a big tick problem at our place, but have had our share of other pests in our vegetable gardens. Guineas are far less destructive in the garden than chickens, as they do not scratch. So I have great hopes that these interesting looking birds will find their new home suitable and will settle in easily. This will be a new experience for me to be sure and I will keep you posted as I progress in this new adventure.

<http://txmg.org/somervell/garden-info/gardening-articles/garden-articles-2012#Apr2012>