

Gardening in 2012
By Shirley D. Smith, President
Somervell County Master Gardeners

A New Year has begun and new opportunities lie before us like an unending West Texas sunrise. Opportunities AND challenges. Because of the possibility of another summer much like the last, as gardeners we will be challenged to keep what plants we do have watered and healthy. With water becoming more and more of an issue for those living in the rural areas as well as folks living in suburbia, we will need to discover which plants can endure the depressive heat with little or no supplemental watering. Sound like an impossibility? No, not at all! One must just get on the Internet to search out Texas native plants and see that there are numerous species that will not only do well, but also actually thrive in heat and minimum watering. Native plants are my first choice, but I am not opposed to planting an adapted plant from another "foreign" locale.

The SCMGA has all new officers for 2012 and we are excited about seeing what the New Year has to offer.

Gardening is such a wonderful hobby I wonder why everyone is not out getting dirt under his or her fingernails! Alas, "different strokes for different folks!" However, if you have even the slightest interest in gardening and want to further your knowledge in that area, then please contact this wonderful group of people personally or through our website: www.somervellmastergardeners.org. You can also email us at somervellmg@gmail.com. Have a gardening question that has been bothering you for some time? Then please feel free to contact us and we will do our best to answer you.

Here's wishing you a Happy 2012 and Happy Gardening!

Start Tomato Seeds Soon

by Donna Hagar, Somervell County Master Gardener

Tomatoes. Nothing is better fresh from the garden! And of course, once you have eaten homegrown tomatoes, you'll never want grocery store tomatoes again! There are many varieties of tomatoes that will do well in our part of Texas. Many people prefer to buy their tomato starts from local nurseries or home garden centers. But for those gardeners who want to try specialty tomatoes or want a favorite heirloom variety, planting from seeds may be the only option. Following a few simple steps will ensure you can have more tomato plants so you can even share some seedlings with friends.

The best time to start tomatoes from seed is generally 6 weeks before last frost—March 15th for Somervell County. That would make around February 1st the appropriate start date. This gardener prefers an extra couple of weeks start, just to make sure the tomato transplants have a good strong start.

For the most variety selection, seed catalogs are your best resource. Most of the sources have online websites for ordering as well. See Wally's article for some favorites!

To start your seeds, use 2 inch plastic pots and your favorite seed starting mix. Purchased, sterile, seed starting mix is best. Do not use native garden soil to avoid potential soil borne diseases from compromising your starts. Moisten the soil to the point of a wet but not dripping sponge.

Place 2 seeds per pot but **BE PREPARED** to snip the weaker of the two if both happen to germinate. Yes, this can be very traumatic – killing the very thing you are trying to grow. But survival of the fittest is your best bet for ensuring a strong tomato plant. If you just can't bear to part with your "babies", you can carefully remove one seedling and transplant it to another pot and attempt to double your seedling production.

Place the pots in a 70 degree room under artificial light for 14 hours per day. Keep the light source (fluorescent grow lights work best) just a few inches above the seedlings as possible and raise the light as the seedlings grow. To promote shorter, stockier growth, subject the seedlings to a gentle breeze regularly. Or simply give them a gentle petting every day.

When the seedlings are 6" tall, transplant them to larger pots. 4-6" should do. Plant the transplants outside, one to two weeks after last average frost day, or by the end of March for us. Be sure to harden them off by letting the plants spend a few hours a day outside a week prior to transplanting. You may still need to protect them from those pesky late freezes that regularly plague our area. This protection can be accomplished by placing old nursery pots or cardboard boxes over the tomatoes when temperatures threaten below freezing.

Resource-Willhite Seed News

Favorite Plants of Master Gardeners

GOLDEN CROWNBEARD - (CowPen Daisies) By Nancy Hillin, Somervell County Master Gardener

Common Name / Scientific Name: CowPen Daisies / *Verbesina Encelioides*

Native / Adaptive: Native annual often classified as an herb, weed or wildflower

Height: Up to five feet

Spread: Up to three feet across; re-seeds itself via of a prolific seed crop

Light: Full sun

Seasonal Interest: Abundant blooms April through October

Colors / Features: Two inch yellow flower disks with broad rays and grayish-green triangular leaves

Water: Frugal to no watering; extremely drought tolerant; blooms and keeps blooms on 100 degree days

Maintenance: None necessary, although pruning or deadheading will make more hearty flower heads

Wildlife: CowPen Daisies are a host plant for Bordered Patch butterflies and favorites of Gulf Fritillaries, Painted Ladies, Queens and Monarchs. Bumble bees often frequent CowPen Daisies.

Deer: Deer take no interest in this plant.

Comments / Experience with the plant: The Golden Crownbeard was given the more common name, CowPen Daisies, because it seems to grow best in disturbed soils like the soil found where cows have been tromping around. But, contrary to its name, it should not be allowed to grow where animals are grazing. It contains the toxin galegine that causes poisoning if ingested in large quantities. But, properly placed, it is a butterfly and bee magnet. Keep it in an area to itself as some other species of plants may not be able to germinate or grow because of the allelopathic (toxin) effects. Despite these warnings, CowPen Daisies make up for it all by being one of the most dramatic and drought resistant plants to be found. When all else was succumbing to the long hot summer of 2011, it was wonderful to see the CowPen Daisies just outside my garden in full bloom. You can rest assured that when this plant starts to bloom, the bees and butterflies will soon follow.

Sources: Native Texas Plants, Tamu.edu

Wade's WallyWorm Word

"SEEDS"

WallyWorm and Wade are getting ready for spring by poring over their new seed catalogues. Here are a few of the free ones that are offered.

SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE
3094 North Winn Road
Decorah, Iowa 52101
(563) 382-5990

JOHNNY'S SELECTED SEEDS
P.O. Box 299
Waterville, Maine 04903
1-877-564-6697

NICHOL'S GARDEN NURSERY
1190 Old Salem Road NE
Albany, OR. 97321
1-800-422-3985

BAKER CREEK HEIRLOOM
2278 Baker Creek Road
Mansfield, MO. 65704
(417) 924-8917

PLANET NATURAL
1612 Gold Ave.
Bozeman, MT. 59715
(406) 587-5891

TOTALLY TOMATOES
334 W. Stroud Street
Randolph, WI. 53956
1- 800-345-5977

SEEDS OF CHANGE
P.O. Box 4908
Rancho Dominguez, CA.90224
1-888-762-7333

THE COOK'S GARDEN
P.O. Box C5030
Warminster, PA. 18974-0574
1-800-457-9703

HARRIS SEEDS
355 Paul Road
Rochester NY. 14624-0966
1-800-544-7938

SOW TRUE SEED
146 Church Street
Asheville, North Carolina 28801
(828) 254-0708

BURPEE SEED
300 Park Ave.
Warminster, PA. 18974
1-800-888-1447

GURNEY'S SEED & NURSERY
P.O. Box 4178
Greendale, IN. 47025-4178
(513) 354-1491

January Garden Tips

by Donna Hagar, Somervell County Master Gardener

With a few 70 degree days recently, going outside and getting our hands dirty becomes a big priority! We all know these warm days are here only occasionally this time of year and taking advantage of them is a must. So when we get those wonderful temperatures in the middle of winter, here are some things you can do to keep you busy and prepare for even better days to come. And a couple of other tidbits, too!

Add compost to established asparagus, strawberries and roses

Plant bare root roses, trees and shrubs.

Plant onion sets - attend our monthly Community Horticulture Education Series on Monday night, Jan. 9 at 6:30 at the Somervell County Citizens Center to learn how to maximize your yield!

Continue to plant lettuces and salad greens. These do well all during the winter as long as they are protected from freezes with blankets, row covers, etc.

Shopping! Yes, shopping! Seed shopping that is. On those days when being outside just doesn't call, nothing is more inspiring than browsing those wonderful seed catalogs. See Wally Worm's article for a list of some favorite resources.

Late this month, start your tomato seeds indoors.

Don't forget to water, particularly if a freeze is expected and we have had no appreciable rain.

Clean and sharpen garden tools.

Do not be tempted to trim perennials just yet. Trimming now could potentially encourage new growth during these warmer days only to be frozen back when temperatures fall, thus weakening the plants. The winter die back acts as a mulch. Wait to trim until early March.

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