

West Texas Gardening

"There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments"

– Janet Kilburn Phillips

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HOWDY!

Dear Readers,

Summer is just around the corner. Hard to believe we are already in June!

In this issue, I talked about the increasing popularity and demand for Native Plants in our area. Also, showcase an insect and a plant you might have had the pleasure of hosting in your garden.

Happy Gardening,

Sara Moran

*Horticulture County Extension Agent
Ector & Midland Counties*

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NATIVE PLANTS HAVE ENTERED THE CHAT!

BY SARA MORAN, HORTICULTURE AGENT, ECTOR & MIDLAND COUNTIES.



I was traveling last month, visiting my family in California, and I noticed native plants incorporated into the landscape almost everywhere we went. I have also seen more articles, professionals, and social media posts talking about the importance of native plants. Residents in the Permian Basin are also increasingly interested in learning about native plants, incorporating them into their gardens, and recognizing the environmental, economic, and aesthetic benefits of planting species native to their local regions. Social media has further accelerated this trend. Gardeners regularly share photos, success stories, and educational content that inspire others to create native plant gardens. But what are native plants, and why do they matter?

Native plants are species that have evolved over thousands of years in a specific geographic area. Because they are adapted to local soils, climate conditions, and wildlife, they often thrive with less maintenance than non-native ornamental plants -and let's be honest, who does not want a less maintenance plant/landscape?.

Additionally, native plants have developed important ecological relationships with local insects, birds, and other wildlife. Bees, butterflies, moths, and other pollinating insects depend on native flowers for food and habitat. Many native insects have evolved alongside specific plant species and cannot survive without them. Native plants produce seeds, fruits, and insects that serve as essential food sources for birds year-round.

The first two native plants I planted in my garden were an eye-opening experience. I purchased them at the Permian Basin Master Gardener plant sale about 3 years ago. Gregg's Mist Flower (*Conoclinium dissectum* (*Eupatorium greggii*)) and Frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*), both 1-gal containers. The Gregg's Mist Flower has grown about 3 ft wide. The first year, the number of butterflies dancing in the wind and jumping from flower to flower was insane. There were some skippers too. I spend more than 30 minutes looking at them and trying to get the perfect butterfly picture.

The second plant was Frogfruit, a groundcover. I have rock mulch in my front yard, which I do not like, but I did not want to remove it either, so I decided on a quick fix instead. Then frogfruit was the perfect answer! And it did not disappoint. It has expanded (about 3 ft wide), and it is covering almost the entire area. Note: If you decide to do something similar, be sure the area is not heavily trafficked in your landscape. Frogfruit will tolerate light traffic; however, the rocks can create an uneven walking area. Frogfruit has small white flowers that appear on short stems, as if they are floating on top of the dense green foliage...and then, butterflies and bees will make their appearance!



Picture from Native American Seed

Then, every year I have incorporated one or two native plants to my landscape. Beauty Berry (*Callicarpa americana*), Yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*), Texas Betony (*Stachys coccinea*), Turkscap (*Malvaviscus drummondii*), Rock Rose (*Pavonia lasiopetala*), and Fall aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*), to name a few, are now part of the landscape.



Rock Rose (*Pavonia lasiopetala*)



Beauty Berry (*Callicarpa americana*)



Fall aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*)

Maintenance is minimal. We cut them back once a year, typically February-March; I don't do it every year. Irrigation is also minimal once they are established. Established plants thrive on a deep, infrequent watering schedule—typically just once or twice a month during the intense summer heat, and little to none in the winter (from Native American Seed). Planting native species is one of the simplest and most effective actions we can take to support pollinators, conserve water, and reduce maintenance. Another plus: native plants often do not require fertilizers, pesticides, and soil amendments.

A common misconception is that native plant gardens appear wild or unkempt. However, they can be beautiful and beneficial. Native plants can be incorporated into a wide range of styles, from formal gardens to naturalistic plantings. Their ability to attract butterflies, birds, and other wildlife adds a layer of enjoyment that traditional landscapes may not provide.

Know Your insect

Tomato Hornworm, is a large green caterpillar that feeds on tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and other plants in the nightshade family. It has a very soft skin. They look so cute when they are eating too. Yes, they can defoliate your plant or cause damage to the fruit. Hand-picking is an effective control method, and natural predators such as parasitic wasps help keep populations in check.

Keep in mind, that tomato hornworms are the larval stage of the hawk or sphinx moth, which are equally beautiful as well.

Tomato Hornworm is a perfect example that if you like moths or butterflies in your garden, you also need to love caterpillars!



Plant Spotlight



LARKSPUR

Larkspur (*Delphinium* sp.) a beautiful cool-season flowering plant known for its tall spikes of colorful blooms in shades of blue, purple, pink, and white. It attracts bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, making it a valuable addition to gardens and landscapes.

Larkspur grows best in full sun and well-drained soil and often reseeds itself for blooms in future seasons. Its striking flowers are also popular in cut flower arrangements.

I might have an Answer

What is wrong with my tree?

I received this question quite often. Usually, it hits my email with a couple of pictures. My response includes more questions than answers.

Many factors can affect a tree's health, including pests, diseases, drought stress, overwatering, nutrient deficiencies, root damage, weather extremes, or physical injury. Pictures of the entire tree, the affected leaves or branches, and the trunk are helpful. Providing as much information as possible is crucial. Tree identification is also important. Knowing the type of tree helps us understand its normal growth habit and its appropriate growing conditions.

I also want to know everything about the tree. For example, how often do you water the tree? Do you water by hand, sprinkler system, or something else? Is it growing in the middle of your lawn, or does it have mulch at the base, or rocks? When was the tree planted? Were girdling/ circular roots removed? Any additional material removed (burlap, chicken wire, etc.)?. Also include information about chemical application (fertilizer, insecticide, fungicide, etc.).

Regarding the symptoms, providing information on how long the symptoms have been present. Are the symptoms spreading or localized? oozing, discoloration, etc.

Sometimes, there is evidence that the damage to the tree is caused by insects (holes in the trunk, chewing on the leaves), a disease (discoloration pattern, oozing, fungal spores), environmental factors (freeze, drought, hail damage), or human activity (compaction due to heavy equipment, planted too deep, irregular watering).

Physical inspection can complete the picture for a more accurate diagnosis.

Then, the next time you want to know what is wrong with your tree? Provide as much information as you know about the tree and its growing conditions; otherwise, do not be surprised if you receive more questions than answers. A diagnosis is as good as the information provided.



Fall Vegetable Gardening in West Texas

Please join me for a program on fall vegetable gardening in West Texas
No Registration and No Fees Required

Saturday Morning June 20, 2026
From 10:00 AM until Noon

Midland Campus
West Texas Food Bank
1601 Westcliff Dr.
Midland Texas



Many people do not know that you can vegetable garden year-round in West Texas. There are many cool loving vegetable crops that grow well in our mild fall and winter climate. There are many advantages to fall gardening, including a great selection of vegetables, cooler working conditions, plus it requires much less water!

John Cappadonna - Presenter

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SUSTAINABLE SOURCED SATURDAYS

From Garden to Pantry

Participants will learn the basics of starting a garden, seasonal considerations, and harvesting tips.

The program will then shift to preserving fruits and vegetables, highlighting safe, practical methods that extend shelf life, reduce food waste, and help make the most of your homegrown produce.

Saturday, July 11, 2026
Midland County Extension Office
2445 E. Hwy 80, Midland, TX 79706

Program Schedule
9:00 – 9:10 AM | Registration
9:10 – 10:30 AM | About the Garden
10:30 – 10:45 AM | Break
10:45 AM – 12:00 PM | Hands on activity

\$25

Includes all materials activity!
Per person. Limited spots available!



REGISTER HERE

WORD SEARCH

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t	u	d	p	q	i	u	g	h	w
a	c	m	a	l	p	m	k	a	a
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a	a	r	i	v	r	p	l	m	r
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n	a	t	i	v	e	s	w	j	r

**Hawkmoth
Larkspur**

**Summer
Natives**

**Water
Care**

EDITORS & CONTRIBUTORS

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THANK YOU!

Joshua Maranon, for your help and patience creating this newsletter!