Great Water Wise Plants
for
Lea County Gardens
Series Written by David Hooten

Part I

Starting with this article, I will be debuting a series on great water wise and low maintenance proven landscape plants for Lea County and into West Texas gardens. These plants will perform in our climate, ranges of temperature extremes and drought hardiness. Plants identified in the article will thrive on low water irrigation practices and they are tough and colorful. The varieties that will be discussed are readily available in the local nurseries and retail garden centers.

**Autumn Sage** – Sages and salvias are in the same plant family and are tough plants to beat in our Lea County landscapes. Autumn Sage, also know as cherry sage bears evergreen leaves through the year. They have a wide array of flower colors to choose from, red, purple, pink, salmon, violet and even two-tone colors on some of the newer hybrids. The start blooming early spring and through to the fall frost will magnificent displays of color. They are definitely an attractant flower for butterflies and hummingbirds in your garden. Grow Salvia gregii (Autumn sage) in full sun and well-drained soils. Do not keep their roots wet or they will rot out. They reach to two or three feet in height and spread. Easy to grow and low maintenance trimming.

**Yellow Columbine** – A graceful and striking water wise perennial plant for our gardens. Yellow Columbine (sometimes sold as Texas Columbine) is vigorous, heat-tolerant specie suited for the desert southwest landscapes. It is one tough plant and will re-seed readily once established. It is another hummingbird and butterfly magnet. It blooms heavily in the spring season and then sporadic blooms through the summer. It dies down in the fall and comes back in the following spring; sometimes a few leaves stay green marking its location in the winter. Grow Yellow Chrysantha Columbine in full sun for best bloom. It will perform in a partial shaded area. It must have well-drained soil. Too much water will rot the center crown out.
**Wine Cups** – A great groundcover with displays of eye-catching flowers and is an excellent water wise plant for Lea County gardens. Wine Cups are tough and hardy. They produce an abundance of burgundy red flowers from late spring through mid-summer. Wine Cups have an appealing dark green, low growing and attractive divided leaves. Wine Cups are a perennial with a large tuberous root when established.

Growing Callihoe involucrate (Wine Cups) need full sun and well-drained soil. Overly irrigated and standing water will rot this prized desert native low-water use plant out. Wine Cups will spread over an area and reach upwards to a foot tall as they bloom.

**Red Yucca** – This is not a true yucca as we know yuccas in Lea County. They are truly an outstanding performer in Lea County gardens and will tolerant a wide range of soils and moisture conditions. Red yuccas offer a spectacular bloom period with spikes of red flowers. There is a yellow flowered form of this plant that is great. The red yuccas will attract scores of hummingbirds when they are in bloom. It is a reliable plant for heat and drought-tolerance.

Growing Hesperaloe parviflora (Red Yucca) is easy. They need full sun and well-drained soil. They can grow in some partial shading, err on more sunshine. Remove the green seedpods that form along the stem as they are great about reseeding themselves in the right conditions. Small plants will grow into large clumps quickly by basal outgrowth. Height reaches four to five feet.