Drought defiant plants for the Central Texas native plant garden

By Bob Kamper

You may have noticed this year’s record drought and heat and seen it reflected in either your lawn and garden or your water consumption for replacing the missing rainfall. Even native plants that normally thrive throughout the summer, such as autumn sage (*salvia greggii*) are having a difficult time unless they are receiving supplemental watering.

On the other hand, a few plants seem to stand out even in triple-digit temperatures, providing a welcome alternative to visions of gardens of cacti and stone in the future. Allowing for at least some supplemental hydration in addition to the scant rainfall, the following species (and photos) have been observed thriving in either my yard or at the Brushy Creek MUD Xeriscape Demonstration Garden. Obviously, they all have done well during this summer of high heat and low rainfall, and require little additional water, if any, to stay alive.

Several shrubs and small trees are doing quite well, including **Huisache** (*Acacia farnesiana*), **Retama** (*Parkinsonia aculeate*), **Texas mountain laurel** (*Sophora secundiflora*), **Texas persimmon** (*Diospyros texana*), **Texas Yellowbells** (*Tecoma stans*) and **Turk's Cap** (*Malvaviscus arboreus var. drummondii*).
Texas Persimmon
Texas Yellowbells
Turks Cap (*malaviscus arboreus var. drummondi*) These beauties seem to be blooming in abundance – perhaps due to environment stress? – but would be prolific throughout the summer anyway. In addition to the attractive foliage, Turks Caps attract butterflies and hummingbirds until late in the fall. This flower also comes in a white variety.
Perennials, Vines and Groundcover.

Perhaps the only perennial that actually seems to like the sun these days is Gayfeather (*Liatris mucronata*). Although it can not be said that its blossoms are lush this year, at least they are apparent, and apparently undeterred by the heat.

**Flame acanthus** (*anisacanthus quadrifidus var. wrightii*) is holding up well, although it is doing better where it gets shade part of the day.

**Fetid Passionflower** (*Passiflora foetida*) has displayed a robustness that is greatly appreciated by the solitary bees that feed on its blossoms every morning. Sadly, the Gulf Fritillary butterflies have not been in abundance this year. Although the *Buffalograss* has turned brown in the summer heat, the **Sensitive Briar** (*Mimosa roemeriana*) has stayed green without much supplemental water. (I do give a hand administered soaking to the grass and groundcover at least once a month). For further information about the native plants mentioned in this article, please visit [http://www.wildflower.org/explore/](http://www.wildflower.org/explore/).
Flame Acanthus (anisacanthus quadrifidus var. wrightii) Another red flower that attracts hummingbirds and butterflies, also known as hummingbird bush, the acanthus making a living as understory shrubs seem to have done well this year while those that are out in the sun on their own have become sere and withered, at least at their extremities.
With regular irrigation, **Gregg’s Mistflower** (*Conoclinum greggii*) appears to be doing quite well at the BCMUD Xeriscape garden, where this picture was taken, showing copious blooms and crowds of Queen butterflies. My own experience with less frequent supplemental watering has been less volume in both the blossom and butterfly areas. All of these drought defiant natives have a long bloom period, beginning in Spring and continuing through Autumn, and they all attract hummingbirds, butterflies, or both, to your yard, in addition to the more prosaic pollinators of the insect world. Finally, who wouldn’t prefer red, white, blue, or purple blossoms in their yard instead of dead brown grass, or large water usage bills?
Passion flower vine (*Passiflora foetida*) Doesn’t seem to mind the drought as its vine aggressively twines its way across trellis, fence and anything else it can get its tendrils on from May through December. The attractive flowers open in the morning and are worked by a variety of nectar seeking insects. Passion flower vines are the plant host of the Gulf Fritillary butterfly as well, which is partial to any variety of passion flower.