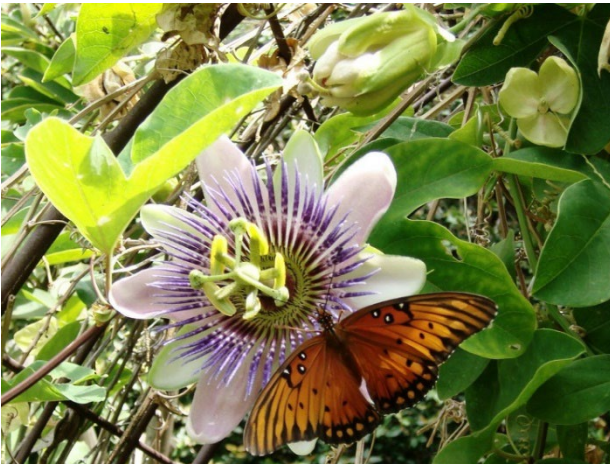


Gardening Basics

Plants that Bring Nature into your Landscape



"Butterfly on Passion Flower 3" by Wha'ppen is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

July and August can be challenging months for gardeners in North Central Texas, but they can also be some of the most fulfilling. Our social media has been filled with pictures of the common native lizards, Green Anoles (*Anolis carolinensis*), as well as caterpillars and their chrysalis with beautiful butterflies emerging to dry their wings. What could be a better place to watch Nature than in your own garden?

These habitat-rich landscapes have an assortment of native plants that support our local wildlife. Native milkweeds are crucial to help the Monarch butterfly migrations, but many other plants will also make our landscapes a haven for Nature and provide real-life learning opportunities for our children, grandchildren, and neighborhoods.

Cultivating a wildlife habitat is not hard and doesn't mean that your landscape must look like a park. The secret is to apply the same guidelines as for any other plants: select a suitable location, plant them in defined beds, and keep them controlled with prudent pruning and thinning.

Plants to Attract Wildlife in the Spring

- **Carolina Jessamine** (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) This beautiful evergreen vine is one of the first things to bloom in the spring, so provides a good nectar source before many others are available. Keep it neat and tidy with scissors.
- **Coral Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*) Choose this evergreen vine to cover a trellis to block a view or add interest to your landscape. It also can be controlled with minimal effort with scissors. With its red blooms, coral honeysuckle is a hummingbird magnet, so consider planting it near a window.
- **Passionflower Vine** (*Passiflora incarnata*) This is a deciduous vine that dies to the ground in winter but grows quickly when the weather warms. The plant is host to the Gulf Fritillary butterfly, (*Agraulis vanillae*).
- **Frogfruit** (*Phyla nodiflora*) Consider frogfruit as a groundcover. With very small leaves and flowers, it is both a larval host and a source of nectar for the Common Buckeye butterfly, (*Junonia coenia*).
- **Pigeonberry** (*Rivina humilis*) This groundcover has small white to pink flowers that produce red berries for foraging wildlife and birds.



Coral Honeysuckle, Courtesy Sally and Andy Wasowski, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Looking for some great blooming flowers?

There are almost too many to choose from, so we recommend consulting these lists when you shop at nurseries and plant sales:

- compiled by the local chapter (Trinity Forks) of the Native Plant Society of Texas Native Plant List - Butterfly Garden, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S23Gfwc7Wt49bhCMITCV3eB1TUOrKtwx/view>
- for our Cross Timbers Region, see the Lady Bird Johnson National Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database - Special Collection - Cross Timbers, <https://www.wildflower.org/collections/collection.php?collection=er29>.

Fall Flowers

Fall bloomers are in demand by butterflies, bees, and other pollinators, and don't necessarily get as much attention as the Spring bloomers, but here are three that will make your yard come alive:

- **Blue Mistflower** (*Eupatorium coelestinum*)
This plant spreads nicely and blooms later in the Summer and into Fall, so it is an excellent nectar source for Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) headed to Mexico for the winter, as well as other butterflies looking for a meal.
- **Gregg's Mistflower** (*Conoclinium greggii*)
This is a beautiful plant that blooms through most of the summer and provides many species with a nectar source through the dry months. Another plus is the foliage which is almost lime green with deeply cut lobes.
- **Fall Aster** (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) Bright purple daisy-like flowers at the end of October are the perfect energy source for Monarchs and other butterflies. Cut it back by no more than half in June to force it to branch and achieve a more compact plant with a dense display of flowers.



"Queen butterflies (*Danaus gilippus*)", Anne Toal, CC-BY 2.0

Shrubs

If you have lost your roses to Rose-Rosette Disease or your shrubs are looking sad as a result of age, it's time to replace them. Here are a few suggestions to help rejuvenate the landscape:

- **Autumn Sage** (*Salvia greggii*) This plant is almost indestructible, blooming from early spring until late in the winter, therefore providing a nectar source for pollinators and shelter for tiny wildlife. Wait to prune until late winter as it provides shelter for beneficial insects.
- **Coralberry**, (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) This little shrub will bring a new texture to your garden with its small leaves and arching growth habit. The magenta berries in the winter are a good food source for birds and other wildlife, and its dense evergreen foliage provides habitat year-round.
- **Cenizo, Texas Sage** (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) This evergreen shrub comes in both green- and silver-foliaged varieties and blooms almost anytime we have heavy humidity or rain. It provides cover for birds and creatures as well as nectar when blooming. This shrub is very easy to contain and requires minimal attention once established.



"Cenizo with Bee" by Gruenemann is licensed under CC-BY 2.0.

Selecting Plants

There are a few things to keep in mind when selecting native plants:

- Each needs to be planted in the right spot to meet its sun/shade/water needs.
- Each needs good sandy loam soil in which to grow, so you may need to amend clay soil with compost. Most conventional landscapes are on lots that were scraped clean of our rich prairie topsoil during construction, and it may or may not have been replaced to the depths needed.
- Natives require less water over their lifetime than other plants, but they still need regular watering during their first year while their roots are developing (two years for shrubs and three years for trees).
- Natives require less maintenance over time, but to keep our landscape tidy and perhaps our neighbors happy, it is still important to prune occasionally and to clean up the edges where these happy natives are spreading. This is your opportunity to share some plants (called passalongs) with your friends and neighbors.

Enjoy your landscape and share it with wildlife. We can all have a real peek at the natural world right outside our door with just a few thoughtful plant selections and a little attention.

Resources

“Find Plants”, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center - The University of Texas at Austin, (accessed 13 April 2025),
<https://www.wildflower.org/plants/>

“Native Plant List – Butterfly Garden”, Native Plant Society of Texas, Trinity Forks Chapter, (accessed 13 April 2025),
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S23Gfwc7Wt49bhCMITCV3eB1TUOrKtwx/view>

“*Passiflora incarnata*”, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, (accessed 13 April 2025)
https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=PAIN6

“*Phyla nodiflora*”, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, (accessed 13 April 2025),
https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=PHNO2

“Shrubs”, Gardening Basics Series, DCMGA, (accessed 13 April 2025), <https://www.dcmga.com/garden-basics-shrubs/>

“What to Plant”, Native Plant Society of Texas, Trinity Forks Chapter, (accessed 13 April 2025),
<https://www.npsot.org/chapters/trinity-forks/trinity-forks-resources/tf-what-to-plant/>

“Wildscapes”, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, (accessed 13 April 2025),
<https://tpwd.texas.gov/wildlife/wildlife-diversity/wildscapes/>.

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