

# NPSOT Tonkawa Chapter

## Looking Forward to a Colorful Fall

### Ahh, Spring bloomers

Wasn't it lovely having all those blooms in the Spring? But now the heat of summer is here and many of those plants are done for the year and are turning brown.

Now what? Well if you have planned well there are many green plants in your yard that are taking the heat in stride, waiting for fall to come. A few may already be blooming and adding other color in addition to being green.

What plants you ask? Let us tell you about the Maxamilian, Gay-feather and Ironweed to name three. Our Ironweed is currently blooming while the other two are green and growing.

The Maxamilian Sunflower doesn't bloom till fall but provides a green growth from Spring till winter. The plant grows to between three and ten feet tall (but usually 4 – 6 feet) depending on the environment. The numerous blooms, which come on about August and can last through November, are about three inches across. The abundant sunflower seeds are appreciated by the birds and other wildlife. But for our story, the fact that it is green during the summer and blooms during the fall accounts for its inclusion in this edition.

The picture (below left) is of the Maxamilian flowers and on the right plants in the field in front of our house, where they haven't been watered.

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*Okay sure another yellow flower, a sunflower at that but what else is there?*

*Well let us show you.*



*Here we have Gay-feather by Miller Springs Park where it isn't watered demonstrating its durability.*



*A closer look at the Gay-feather flower, this picture doesn't do justice to its iridescent showiness.*

## Gay-feather

This plant seems to say, "Drought, heat, no worries, just let me show you what I can do."

But you will have to be patient because this plant doesn't bloom till the August-October time frame. Its height runs two to four feet depending on conditions. From what we have seen it is adaptable to various soils but wants full sun. If planted in the shade it will lay down to reach for the sun. But as we have stressed in this article it is currently green, even after fourteen 100 degree days so far this summer. We also enjoy its light and airy structure as it moves with the wind.



This picture (taken June 20, 2011) is of a row of Gay-feather along our driveway. Notice how green and lush it looks, while thriving in our windy, rain-free, 100 degree weather.

*Hopefully you are thinking, "That's pretty cool (or hot depending on your point of view). But wait there is more, please proceed to page three.*

## Ironweed

### Sweet Nectar



Well if you were a butterfly you would think “sweet nectar” as you saw the Ironweed in bloom. And that nectar is available in the heat of summer through fall (June – September). Looking at the bloom you can probably guess this plant is in the Aster family.

When a lot of other flowers have given up, the Ironweed is just getting started while bringing a little color to your garden. In the top picture you may be able to see some other plants turning brown but not the Ironweed, it still has a long way to go before it gives up.

Another benefit to the plants we have selected for this issue is they produce more plants, so you can share some with your friends and neighbors. Once established you do not have to worry about replacing them as they will continue to reproduce. Think about the money savings in plant material and water, plus the added benefit of reduced maintenance.

We can only speak as to our own experience but we have been pleased with the durability, ease of care, attractiveness to wildlife and visual appeal of these plants.



*This is Western Ironweed in June in the sun and standing tall and strong against the wind reaching for the sky.*



*This flower stands out against the green background especially to a hungry butterfly.*



*“Okay, so they look nice but is there another reason I should consider native plants like these?”*

# Drought

We are expecting another year of low rainfall amounts.

“You don’t have to go out and plant rocks and cactus, Texas has hundreds of native flowering plants and trees,” (Kelly Conrad Bender)

**We hope you have found this newsletter thoughtful and helpful so you may enjoy your gardens and landscape even more while using less water.**

**Donna and Bruce Slack**

## **As Drought Intensifies, Wildscaping Can Help Texans Save Water**

AUSTIN —Texas residents are asked to monitor and reduce their water usage, yet home and land owners may feel they have little control over resource conservation when it comes to manicured lawns and upkeep of green spaces. They may have heard of alternative gardening as a way to cut costs and save water, but may not know where to turn for advice or information.

“Wildscaping is a way to incorporate native plants into outdoor spaces to conserve water while preserving our Texas heritage,” said (Kelly Conrad) Bender.

If you want to attract native honey bees and butterflies, consider planting sunflowers or gray goldenrods.

Attracting native wildlife with indigenous plants can also decrease the number of pests flying or crawling around your property. Texas critters who naturally avoid human domiciles tend to compete with others who become household pests, decreasing their prevalence in your home.

The Texas Wildscapes site offers complete information on how to get started, from selecting native plants appropriate for each Texas region to designing a Wildscape garden. Whether you are planning a project for your backyard or a clay pot on your windowsill, the Texas Wildscapes book, DVD or can show the way. On the Net:

- <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildscapes/>

[Excerpts from TPWD news release]