



## **FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...**

### **RETHINKING THE FRONT YARD**

By

Helen Pemberton, Palo Pinto County Master Gardener

Watering the front lawn is fast becoming a memory. Things are tough all over Texas, but especially hard on people who depend on lakes that are nearly dry. These conditions may improve in the future, but hopefully a lesson has been learned. Water is just too precious to squander.

There is a lot of interest now in rethinking the front yard. What can be done to keep things beautiful? A new landscape plan using more walkways, more sweeping flower beds full of native plants and tiny islands of green (not necessarily grass) is the answer.

An easy place to start is with paths. If the house only has a sidewalk from the driveway to the front door, consider adding a 4 foot wide, welcoming stone path from the front door to the street. Maybe make it curve a little. That will eliminate a few hundred square feet of thirsty grass! Then add 3 foot wide planting beds on either side of the path. This year's accomplishment might just be outlining the beds with a good border to keep grass from invading, whacking the existing grass down to the ground, covering it with cardboard, 3 inches of soil and some kind of mulch.

That path will be so beautiful, it will be hard to resist planting the beds. Here is where the important decisions are made! Watch throughout the day to see how much sun hits the front yard. If the yard is mostly shady, plant things like oxalis, red columbine, Christmas fern, cedar sage, spiderwort and ajuga. If the yard is sunny, plant a stunning combination of coreopsis, trailing lantana, zinnia and bee balm. Vary the types of plants. Choose some taller than others and plant them on the outside curve of the bed. Find a plant nursery that specializes in native Texas plants and get their ideas...and plants.

If the yard is very big, a front patio and seating area could be placed on one side. Bordered with drought tolerant ornamental grasses, day lilies, roses, apache plume or canna, even a front yard patio can have a little privacy. A small yard could include a tiny bench and birdbath.

When the design proves to be successful, the next desire will be to replace the grass that can't be watered anyway. Dry shade loving ground covers include ajuga, horse herb, vinca, and lamium. Dry sun loving ground covers include mondo grass, asian jasmine, thyme, and dichondra.

And then there is the problem of how to get these new plantings watered. Even drought tolerant plants need water to get established. Rainwater collection seems to be the best alternative these days. That and reuse of grey water from the house...that would be from the shower, washing machine and dishwasher. If the house is on a slab, re-routing grey water might be impossible, but some people are catching water in the shower before it gets hot and watering with that little extra moisture.

The Palo Pinto Master Gardeners are giving a series of talks at the Boyce Ditto Library about these issues. The next one is on May 16, and the subject will be rainwater collection and drip irrigation. !2:00 noon.

Call the Palo Pinto County Agri-Life Extension Office 940-659-1228 with your questions. Master Gardeners will be happy to help.