Desert Favorite  By Master Gardener Andrea Meckley

Spring flowering Mescal Bean or Texas Mountain Laurel (Sophora segundiflora) is the Desert Favorite for May. This is a slow growing, multi-trunked evergreen that can mature to be 15-20 feet high by 8-10 feet wide. Glossy, dark green leaves and beautiful lavender flowers having the scent of grape soda make this an attractive plant. Flowers fade fairly quickly and by midsummer give rise to 3” to 4” fuzzy, tan, seed pods. The brilliant red to dark orange seeds are 3/8” to 1/2” in diameter. Indigenous people used the seeds for ceremonial use and for ornamental jewelry. Seeds are poisonous and contain narcotic properties. The poison risk is limited as the seed coat is very hard and difficult to crack. The same seed coating that protects the seed from drought will allow it to be swallowed and pass through our bodies without harm, in most cases. Placement and maintenance of this shrub should take into account the risk to children and pets. Sophoras naturally form a dense shrub that can be used as a hedge or screen. They can also be trained into the form of a small, multiple trunked tree. Be aware that excessive pruning can inhibit flower production, as Sephora’s produce flowers only on one year old wood. This is a very good plant for southern Nevada because it is a low water user, drought-tolerant, likes full sun, and is hardy to zero degrees Fahrenheit. Native from central Texas west to New Mexico and south to Mexico, it prefers well drained soil. If you are searching for a plant that looks great all year, Texas Mountain Laurel is an appealing addition to a desert or traditional landscape.
Water-Wise Shrub Beds

Choosing appropriate shrubs can help reduce water needs in the landscape. Shrubs can provide a more natural look, screen unsightly objects, create strong seasonal interest in the landscape, and provide a backdrop for showy perennials. Shrubs can also meet habitat and food requirements for a variety of wildlife species.

- Look for native or species adapted to the local climate, soil type, and sun exposure
- Choose flowering and fruiting shrubs for seasonal interest and food for wildlife, if desired
- Mix evergreens and deciduous shrubs to create interesting texture combinations, seasonal interest (color, texture, form), and wildlife habitat
- Combine different size shrubs for visual interest
- Perform a soil test to assess soil conditions such as type, drainage, and fertility
- Apply enough water during the first two years to ensure strong root establishment
- Choose shrubs that require 2 or fewer irrigations per month
- Group shrubs with similar water needs together
- Group plants in a bed to create a more natural look. This will reduce maintenance, water use and lawn area
- Use appropriate spacing based on mature plant size. Some overlap can help create a more natural look
- For a more formal look, create bold, symmetrical patterns by spacing shrubs farther apart to showcase shrub bed shape
- Many shrubs can be clipped or trimmed to create interesting geometric or 'neat' shapes

Read complete article at: http://www.extension.org/pages/61624/plant-selection-for-water-wise-shrub-beds

Upcoming Opportunities:
- Master Gardener Help-line
- Master Gardener Meeting May 2
- Chain Saw needed! Call 702-397-2604
- Newsletter article or pictures
- Weed Warriors
- Grow Your Own!

Companion Planting:
The manufacture and release of certain biochemicals is a factor in the battle against weeds. Allelopathy is a biological phenomenon by which an organism produces one or more biochemicals that influence the growth and survival of other organisms. A positive use of plant allelopathy is the use of mow-killed grain rye as a mulch. The allelochemicals that leach from rye residue prevent seed germination but do not harm transplanted vegetables. She-oak needles as mulch have this same effect!
“You know you’re a Master Gardener If you arrange your schedule around including your MG hours.”

Weed Warriors

Weed Warriors is a University of Nevada Cooperative Extension program which teaches participants to learn how to identify and control the spread of unwanted plants. The program offers introductory-level training in both invasive and common-nuisance weed management. The classes will be presented via videoconference to the Logandale UNCE office.

• May 16, 1-5 p.m. AND May 17, 8 a.m.-noon.

Class Description: Weed law, identification, biology, management and control of the following weeds are discussed:

**Dryland, Noxious Weeds**
- Knapweed, Diffuse
- Knapweed, Russian
- Knapweed, Spotted
- Leafy Spurge
- Medusahead
- Puncturevine
- Thistle, Canada
- Thistle, Musk
- Thistle, Scotch
- Thistle, Yellow Star
- Toadflax, Dalmatian

**Riparian, Noxious Weeds**
- Eurasian Watermilfoil
- Hemlock, Poison
- Hemlock, Western Water
- Hoary Cress (Whitetop)
- Purple Loosestrife
- Tall Whitetop (Perennial Pepperweed)
- Tamarisk (Saltcedar)

**Nuisance Weeds**
- Cheatgrass
- Chicory
- Common Mallow
- Common Mullein
- Curly Dock
- Curlycup Gumweed
- Dodder
- Field Bindweed
- Foxtail Barley
- Kochia (annual)
- Plantain
- Redroot Pigweed

**Grow Your Own!**
Grow your own is a series of back-to-basic gardening classes to help you produce great harvests in Nevada.

July 9 - Starting plants from seed: growing second-season crops
July 16 - Gardening is a contact sport: tool selection
July 23 - Eating on the cheap
July 30 - Composting in small places
August 6 - Insect and critter control: companion planting and other techniques
August 13 - Walipini
August 20 - Aquaponics
August 27 - GMO’s

8 sessions – every Monday from 2 – 4 p.m.

Visit the website! growyourownnevada.com

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Normally when we talk about water wise gardening, we are talking about ornamentals. However, vegetable gardens need to be water wise, too. Vegetables require a lot of water, relatively speaking. It is our responsibility as gardeners to give them what they require in the most efficient manner possible. First, the means of watering: use a soaker hose or drip irrigation. Oscillating sprinklers can lose 40 percent of the water they put out to evaporation in the warmth of the summer sun. That means if you put out 10 gallons, only six reach the ground. You still pay for 10, of course. Second, the amount of water: this amount changes by the season, the plant variety and the development of the plant. Third, there should be no bare soil exposed to the light.

Soaker hoses are very inexpensive and can be laid down easily. To tell how much water they put out, use an empty tuna can and bury it even with the soil line, then drape the hose over the can as if it were watering plants. Turn on the hose and check to see how long it takes to get one inch of water in the tuna can. Remember that number. Drip irrigation can be calibrated in the same way.

Now the amount: You can use that test you performed with the tuna can to tell how long to leave the water on in your garden to supply that one inch. The first week you transplant your vegetable plants, you will probably have to water them one inch worth every couple of days. Their roots are shallow and are still spreading out and developing their ability to soak up water. After the first week or two, watering twice a week and
applying an inch each time is usually sufficient. If you direct sow seeds, the soil should never become too dry. Until the seeds germinate and develop true leaves they should be watered every other day. After which you will probably have to water them every couple of days for two weeks or until their roots spread out enough to pick up ground moisture and nutrients. At this time you should be able to water just twice a week. If plants start to wilt between waterings, you may have to add a third weekly watering.

In short, watering every day is excessive. Not only do you risk problems such as blossom end rot, you give the plant roots no reason to grow deep and pick up ground moisture and nutrients. In turn, they are not as healthy because they cannot utilize soil nutrients as easily. It is better to water less frequently but give the plants a good drink each time.

Next add mulch, mulch, and more mulch! Bare soil exposed to the heat and light accelerates evaporation. Heat exposure causes the plant to transpire more requiring the plant to consume more water. In addition, if you have mulch in your garden, it absorbs some of the water and acts as a time release water dispenser for your plants. It also keeps the soil cooler in the summer months and blocks weeds which compete for water and nutrients.

In summary, to be good stewards of our resources, we need to water efficiently, water in the amounts our plants need, and use mulch to help keep the water in the soil and available to our plants. This allows them to produce the maximum amount of produce for the least amount of water.
Congratulations Spring 2012
Master Gardener Graduates

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