

Native Yellow Flowers Brighten Our Landscape

Like 8 percent of all men, I have a certain degree of “color blindness”, or, more correctly, “color deficiency”. For me, distinguishing red from green or brown requires brighter light or a closer distance for me to see the true colors than most people require. Yellow, on the other hand, I see really well. In fact, the human eye is most sensitive to light in the yellow-to-light green region—you can see a yellow fire truck farther away than a red one.

So maybe that is why my preference in flowers is yellow. In the Hill Country, we are blessed with a lot of native yellow flowers. Here are some of them, starting with spring bloomers.

Engelmann daisy, or Cutleaf daisy, that latter name because of its deeply-incised leaves, is a 1 to 2 foot tall perennial which blooms from March to July with 1 to 1.5 inch flower heads. This past spring many roadsides and pastures turned yellow from millions of tiny yellow Low Bladderpods from March to May. The seeds of this annual must have been around for years waiting for last year’s conditions.

Many gardeners grow Hinckley columbine, native to West Texas, which is a shade-loving evergreen plant 1 to 2 feet tall with yellow blooms sporting five 1 inch “spurs” on the back of the flower. Texas star, an annual, blooms with 1 to 1.5 inch flowers with 5 bright yellow petals from March to May. The plants can be up to 2 feet tall with lance-shaped 5 inch hairy leaves.

Many species bloom beginning in the spring and continue into the summer, including:

Cowpen daisy, so named because it can survive uneaten in a cow pen—not even deer or goats will eat it. This annual can grow up to about 3 feet with dull blue-green leaves and numerous 1 to 2 inch yellow flowers from April to November. Two-leaf senna is another seldom-eaten plant. It has distinctive paired leaves attached together at the end of the stem or petiole. This perennial grows to 2 feet high and produces several 5 petal yellow flowers throughout the spring and summer.

Partridge pea is an annual legume with compound leaves and 1.5 inch yellow pea flowers from June to October. It produces small “pea” pods.

Summer flowers include:

Broomweed, considered a noxious weed by ranchers, is an annual of overgrazed ranges that grows its multi-branched stem structure up to about 3 feet with very narrow leaves topped by many tiny yellow flowers such that when large areas are covered with it, it gives the whole area a yellow hue.

Two small trees that bloom more or less throughout the summer are the Goldenball Leadtree and the Retama. The former has bipinnately compound leaves and produces fuzzy-looking 1 inch diameter yellow ball-shaped flowers sporadically throughout the summer. The Retama has green bark and very long, thin compound leaves, lots of thorns, and produces bright yellow 1 inch blooms most of the summer.

The annual Common Sunflower can grow up to 6 or 8 feet tall, but is frequently somewhat shorter. It makes many branches and produces multiple long-lasting flowers on each branch, each from 2 to 4 inches wide. Birds love the seeds.

Fall may be the showiest period for yellow flowers, at least from the standpoint of the amount of yellow on display.

Maximilian sunflower, a perennial, reportedly one of Lady Byrd Johnson's favorites, grows in round-top clumps frequently several feet in diameter and 2 to 4 feet high. In September it begins putting up bloom stalks, with blossoms opening at the top of the stalk and moving down the stalk. Flowers are 1.5 to 3 inches in diameter.

Both Tall and Prairie goldenrods are perennials. They are commonly believed to cause hay fever, but that is more likely due to ragweeds that produce wind-borne pollen at the same time. Prairie goldenrod grows to about 2 feet tall, while Tall goldenrod can be up to 6 feet tall. Their large flower heads are made up of many smaller flowers making for an impressive yellow display.

Lindheimer's senna or Velvet-leaf senna has very soft, woolly leaves. A perennial, it grows up to 3 feet tall. Its blooms have 5 petals. Yellowbells or Esperanza, is a 3 to 5 foot shrub with very showy 1.5 inch long by 2 inches diameter yellow flowers at the top of the stems. It blooms from April to November.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Until next time...

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