

## Planning Your Landscape

By Jackie Sledge

Past president of Big Country Master Gardeners Association

It's hot today. No, it's very hot, and to paraphrase the Dr. Seuss book, "It's too hot to go out!" I'm tempted to just "sit, sit, sit, sit," but that is not productive so I am thinking and planning as I sit. I have kiddie swimming pools filled with plants I managed to salvage when the house foundation was worked on a few months ago, and I decided that now is the time to make some much-needed changes in the landscape before the plants go back in the ground. The "bones" of the landscape were put in over 20 years ago when we moved into this house, and the trees and large beds that serve as anchors are in good shape except for a few shrubs and plants that need to be replaced. I think we all have some plants that are struggling – or dying – because of the harsh weather conditions we have had the last few years, and these are the areas that need attention.

Here are the questions I am asking, and answering, so the new additions to the yard will be successful:

- What kind of gardens do I want? Do I want flowers, shrubs, ornamental plants, herbs, vegetables, fruits? Do I want any theme gardens such as a water garden, rock garden, pollinator garden?
- Do I want to attract wildlife, or am I concerned about deer, rabbits, and other wildlife eating my plants? Do I need to be sure I can see any snakes before they find me?
- Where do I want to put the new beds? Will the plants need sun or shade? Are the beds close to water sources? Are they where I can see and enjoy them every day?
- Do I want to put plants in the ground or construct raised beds for them? Raised beds make gardening easier, but they need to be watered more often during hot, dry weather.
- Do I need to stop by the Extension Office to get information to have the soil tested?
- Are the plants I want suited for our hardiness zone? (Note: We were in zone 7B, and we are now in zone 8A)
- What are the mature sizes of the plants I want? I need to be sure there is room for the plants I select. The plants should not be overcrowded, and tall plants should not block out shorter ones.
- Can I access the entire bed to water, weed, and fertilize? Beds should be no more than 3 feet wide so the plants in the middle of the bed can be easily accessed.
- Do I want container plants or hanging baskets? These will need to be watered more frequently because they dry out faster than plants in the ground.
- Read garden books, and request seed catalogues for plant and hardscape ideas.
- Attend a gardening class. BCMGA offers Saturday Seminars the last Saturday of the month from February through August as well as programs at the Main Library and the Library South Branch every month.

- **IMPORTANT:** I will keep a garden logbook or journal so I have information on all plants in the landscape.

That is a lot to think about, but answering these questions will ensure that my landscape is what makes me happy and is also successful.

BCMGA offers several free education programs. Library programs are at 6:00 at the South Branch of the Library in the Mall of Abilene on the first Tuesday of the month and at 10:00 at the Main Library in downtown Abilene on the second Friday. We will have the last BCMGA Saturday Seminar for 2023 from 9:00-12:00 on August 26 in the Taylor County Extension Office Conference Room, and the topic this month is Garden Art to Fit All Budgets.

Last, but certainly not least, BCMGA will have a Fall Plant Sale in October. The online sale will begin the morning of October 11 through noon on October 13, and then we will have an in-person sale the morning of October 14 from 8:00 through 12:00. The plants available at the sale are cultivars that will survive – and thrive – in our area.

If you have any questions, call the Taylor County Extension Office at 325-672-6048 or email us at [mgardeners@yahoo.com](mailto:mgardeners@yahoo.com). We hope you visit [bcmgtx.org](http://bcmgtx.org) for all Big Country Master Gardener information and events, like us on BCMGA Facebook, and check out training presentations on BCMGA YouTube. We are here to help you!