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Mitchell Lake Fall Festival

Are you partial to native plants? One of the best places to see native plants is at the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center. One of the best times to visit the center is on October 19 when they hold the Fall Festival. Admission is free, and in addition to the native plant garden, you can tour the center by foot, in a van or on a hayride. There are plant sales and a number of nature-orientated exhibits. Karger’s Last Chance Forever Raptor Show is scheduled for 2 p.m.

At 10 a.m., Texas A&M Engineer Mike Martin will discuss the graywater experiment that he and his team conducted at the center. He will show you how to retrofit your house so you can use the graywater instead of potable water on your landscape for $100 to $500, depending on how fancy you want it.

The Master Gardeners that helped with the graywater project will be on hand to show you the 12 months of native plant color irrigated exclusively with graywater.

Dr. Jerry Parsons, Milton Glueck and I will also do our radio show, “South Texas Gardening” at the Fall Festival. We will be broadcasting from 12 p.m. until 2 p.m., and you can ask any gardening questions you have in-person.

To support the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center financially, buy a raffle ticket. The top prize is a custom built hummingbird and bufferfly garden for the site of your choice. The prize includes services of a landscape architect, Terry Lewis, the plants from Milberger Landscaping and Nursery, mulch and compost from Keller Material, drip irrigation from Hall Irrigation and planting labor by the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas. Your favorite nursery may be selling these tickets, and you can purchase them at the event.

The Audubon Center is at 10750 Pleasanton Road. Take the Moursund Blvd. exit off of South Loop 410 near the Police Academy and proceed one half mile south. Call 210-628-1639 for more information.

If the 12 months of native plant color attracted your attention, here are the plants featured at the Mitchell Lake graywater planting:

* January – use possumhaw holly and beauty berry for the colorful berries; birds will eventually eat the berries.
* February – use Mexican redbud blooms in February.
* March – Bluebonnets, cross vine, Hinckley’s columbine and Texas mountain laurel provide color. Cross vine is an evergreen vine and Hinckley’s columbine grows in the shade.
* April – Mexican olive, Salvia greggii and blue mistflower bloom this month. Blue mistflower is often covered with butterflies for added color.
* May – Grow mealy blue sage and Turk’s cap for color in May. Turk’s cap does well in the shade.
* June – Cenizo blooms before it rains and it is deer proof. Also grow Texas balloon flowers and bee balm for June color.
* July – Sunflower, “Gold Star” esperanza and Texas lantana provide color in the deep part of summer. Sunflower seeds are a favorite type of bird food. Esperanza and lantana are an important part of any deer-proof planting in full sun.
* August – It is hot, but you can count on red yucca and pyramid plant to bloom.
* September- Use purple coneflower for September blooms. It is a reseeding perennial.
* October – There is a lot of selections of Mexican bush sage that are reliable fall bloomers. Butterflies and hummingbirds seek them out. Deer do not eat them.
* November – Fall aster and mint marigold steal the show in November. Butterflies love both mounding perennials. Deer eat fall aster but not mint marigold.
* December – Gulf muhly is an ornamental grass with pink seed heads that make a show for most of the winter.

**Garden Tasks**

There is still time to get your wildflowers planted. Remember they don’t need soil preparation or irrigation, but they do need full sun and the seeds must reach bare soil.

Consider neem oil and/or seaweed extract spray to slow down spider mite infestation. Spray on your tomatoes at least every week underneath the leaves.

The grass has changed its growth mode; it is a good time to consider applying a winterizer lawn fertilizer.

Control scale insects on euonymus citrus, hollies and sago palms with horticultural oil. It is even more effective when mixed with a systemic insecticide like acephate. Follow label instructions.