



Above L to R: *Tradescantia occidentalis* (Prairie Spiderwort); *Silphium simsonii* (Rosinweed); *Vernonia missurica* (Missouri Ironweed) and *Solidago sempervirens* - Seaside goldenrod.

*"Planting just one native species in our yards is a good start,
but planting a diverse collection of plants native
to our region should be our goal" -- Margaret Pierce*

TEXAS TOUGH NATIVES LIFT COLLECTION TO NEXT LEVEL!

**By MARGARET PIERCE
THE GARDEN CLUB OF HOUSTON**



Texas Coneflower (*Rudbeckia texana*)

Many of us understand the importance of incorporating native plants in our landscapes. The extreme heat and drought our region experienced this summer underscores this.

Our native plants are impacted by these intense conditions, but because they have evolved to withstand these weather extremes most are much heartier than



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introduced non-natives. Even if they die back with the heat, or with winter's cold, their root systems are still alive and when conditions improve, they will re-emerge.

Native plants do not operate in a vacuum – they, along with the native bugs, bees, butterflies, and birds thrive when they exist symbiotically in their shared ecosystem. Accordingly, planting just one native species in our yards is a good start, but planting a diverse collection of plants native to our region should be our goal.

Our yards should contain flowers that:

- have different bloom color, shape and time of bloom,
- offer habitat, such as grasses, and
- produce berries and seeds.

Other helpful components include a source of water, ground areas with leaf litter, and native trees and shrubs for cover/habitat.

It is estimated that to realize benefits offered by planting natives in your yard, at least 50 – 70% of the plants should be native. A few cultivars of natives (“nativars”) are OK, but the ecosystem services they offer are often less than what their true native ancestor provides.

To support your native plants, apply native mulch several times a year, adding a couple of inches to all your beds at each application. This provides weed control, water conservation, protection from heat and frost, and nutrients that are appropriate for our natives as the mulch breaks down. Nature's Way Resources has a wonderful selection of native mulches and composts, by the way.

And remember, native gardens require care just as any landscape. You will still need to water, weed, and trim. However, you will benefit from having to water



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less, and you will attract many more pollinators, and support the other critters in your yard's ecosystem. Little or no fertilizer is required if your soil is healthy and you are applying mulch regularly.

In my yard, here are just a few of the natives and a few nativars that have survived the drought and heat unscathed this summer. These are tough plants!

- *Asclepias perinis* - Aquatic Milkweed
- *Callicarpa americana* – American Beautyberry
- *Conoclinium coelestinum* - Blue Mistflower
- *Echinacea purpurea* - Purple Coneflower
- *Muhlenbergia capillaris* - Gulf muhly
- *Rivina humilis* - Pigeonberry
- *Rudbeckia texana* – Texas Coneflower
- *Salvia coccinea* – Scarlet Sage
- *Salvia farinacea* – Mealy Cup Sage
- *Silphium simsonii* - Rosinweed
- *Solidago sempervirens* - Seaside Goldenrod
- *Tradescantia occidentalis* - Prairie Spiderwort
- *Verbesina virginica* - Frostweed
- *Vernonia missurica* - Missouri Ironweed

Sourcing native plants can be a challenge. True native plants can also be found at [Houston Audubon's Natives Nursery](#), [Nature's Way Resources](#), and at native plant sales put on by [Houston Arboretum](#), [Cockrell Butterfly Museum/Houston Museum of Natural Science](#), among other resources.