



A New Kind of Beauty: Colorful, Water-Wise and Low Maintenance

by Susan Franciskovich, UC Master Gardener

Founding Father and preeminent gardener Thomas Jefferson wrote in his later years: "I am still devoted to my garden, but 'tho an old man, I am still a young gardener." Thomas Jefferson would certainly be learning along with us about how to garden in these challenging times of drought. We are all called to become stewards of our landscape as these particular weather conditions affect us all... plus every tree and blade of grass. Like Thomas Jefferson, we are also reminded that we gardeners, old and new alike, are still learning...still "young gardeners."

With that in mind, fall is a good time to learn about what works in the garden. It's time for pruning, removing water-thieving weeds, and careful fall planting. It might also be time for something new. There are some re-discovered native plants, as well as plants from other Mediterranean zones around the world, which are getting local attention and make excellent fall planting choices. I will tell you about three colorful, water-wise, and easy to maintain choices I have made.



Salvia canariensis flower

Canary Island Sage (*Salvia canariensis*): From the mild and dry climate of the Canary Islands, off the coast of north western Africa, comes the Canary Island Sage, a giant of the genus *Salvia*. (The terms *salvia* and *sage* are interchangeable.) This *salvia* is a full sun perennial and is a butterfly and hummingbird magnet. It produces gorgeous purple flowers with multi-colored bracts. (Bracts are modified leaves growing at the base of a flower.) The attractive foliage is covered with long hairs, which have aromatic oil glands; the foliage is silvery-white with a soft, wooly-like appearance. The plant's actual leaves are pale green and arrowhead shaped. A Canary Island Sage can grow 4 to 8 feet in one season, so it is perfect for a back corner in the garden. This slightly woody sage usually only lasts about three seasons, but often new

seedlings are waiting to take over and flourish. The Canary Island Sage can tolerate some summer water and needs no fertilizer. After blooming, the plant dies back and should be cut down to about 1 foot; it will rebound faithfully in spring. By the way, garden lore tells us that sage will add soul to our gardens.

Texas Ranger (*Leucophyllum frutescens*): The hotter the better for this native of Texas and Mexico, commonly called Texas Ranger, Texas Sage, Silver Leaf or Barometer Bush. Though there are many nice color selections and cultivars in the *Leucophyllum* species, the Texas Ranger is one of the oldest and is still a winner. It is a compact but loosely branched shrub that grows 5 to 8 feet tall. It has evergreen grey-silver foliage and produces lots of dark pink flowers when the humidity rises in summer and fall. Rain triggers profuse blooms. The Texas Ranger thrives in full sun



Texas Ranger

with minimal water, an excellent choice for drought and heat. This extremely low maintenance plant attracts hummingbirds, butterflies, and beneficial insects. It never needs fertilizing and may be pruned in spring or summer to remove dead stems and to increase density.

I will watch my Texas Ranger (Barometer Bush) very closely as we inch toward fall and possible rains, since it often flowers a few days before a rainstorm.

Blue Mist Spirea (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*): When few other shrubs are flowering, this well-behaved, full-sun garden plant is a wonderful blooming surprise, especially at the end of summer. Small lavender-blue flower clusters bloom forth from aromatic silvery foliage. The Blue Mist will flower heavily every year although it can be slow to leaf out in spring. This is a very water-wise, high impact but low maintenance plant requiring only occasional water in prolonged dry weather. A deciduous shrub, it will reach about 4 feet in height and width and has a rounded appearance. Blue Mist supplies a rich source of nectar for bees and butterflies, needs no fertilizer, and has no serious insect or disease problems. It can be pruned in early spring down to about a foot tall. This attractive Asian native shrub can be a flowering delight in your garden until frost.



Blue Mist Spirea

It might be time for all of us to try something new in the garden. Mother Nature is asking us to be "young gardeners" in caring for her distressed landscape. We "young gardeners" can still achieve and appreciate beauty in the garden...a new kind of beauty.

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