

Frogfruit

*Story by Troy Reinke, NRCS District Conservationist
Albany, Texas*

Remember the old black and white TV show from the 1950s—Father Knows Best? Many in my generation will not, but everyone of the generation before should. The title implicates that as a parent/guardian, father knows what is best for his family. I would like to coin the phrase—Mother Nature Knows Best. Now we can implicate that Mother Nature knows what is best for her family, the soil, water, air, plants and animals. Mother Nature was very meticulous when she developed those family members to live, survive and thrive together.

I have a question for you home landscapers. Are you looking for a perennial forb that provides an abundance of ground cover, is attractive, beneficial, drought tolerant, and water friendly? Well, actually that is several questions, but with one answer being Frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*). This plant is sometimes referred to as Texas frogfruit or sawtooth frogfruit, is a native perennial forb that grows prostrate about 3 to 6 inches tall. Its ability to grow low to the ground enables it to provide excellent ground cover. Frogfruit can root from its stems, enabling it to form new plants and establish quickly over large areas. Frogfruit is highly adaptable, and with abundant moisture, tends to grow more upright to a height of almost 8 inches. It is easily propagated from seeds or cuttings. It is adapted to grow in coarse, medium and fine textured soils that are well drained. Frogfruit is very drought tolerant, and will persist as an evergreen during the winter months when protected from freezing. It is also capable of withstanding short periods of standing water or flooding.

Texas frogfruit will also grow in areas receiving full sun, as well as in areas that are in partial shade. Frogfruit is easily identified by its long, stiff leaves with their strongly serrated edges, and unique flowers. The flower cone is purplish in color, surrounded by a ring of white blossoms. Frogfruit will bloom from May thru October. Throughout the season, the center flower continues to elongate, with the ring of white blossoms maintaining its place on the top of the cone. The purple cone and ring of white blossoms are very unique and attractive. Frogfruit is an excellent pollinator plant, providing early nectar for many butterfly species and larval food for the Phaon Crescent Spot, Buckeye and White Peacock butterflies. So remember, frogfruit can provide many benefits throughout the year, and Mother Nature does know best! (Photos courtesy of Troy Reinke, USDA-NRCS)

