



“Blooming in the Gardens”

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2021-2022



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of January 2, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

DICK SMITH 'PARADISE' ORCHID (*Potinara* Dick Smith 'Paradise')

This showstopping orchid produces spectacular medium-sized blossoms 3.5-4 inches across, with frilly lips, in multiple shades of purples and yellows—a consistent bloomer each year! Each flower stalk usually has 2-3 flowers, with plants remaining compact, typically 12-15 inches tall.

Potinara (abbreviated Pot.) is actually an orchid nothogenus for intergeneric hybrids containing at least one ancestor species from *Brassavola*, *Cattleya*, *Laelia* and *Sophranitis* as parent genera. Pot. Dick Smith 'Paradise' is a hybrid cross between *Pot.* Hisako Akatsuka x *Rlc.* (*Rhyncholaeliocattleya*) *Hawaiian Lightning*.

See Pot. Dick Smith 'Paradise' orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, with many other varieties, in this unusually prolific December bloom cycle!



LOTEBUSH (*Zizyphus obtusifolia*)

This native shrub, a member of the Buckthorn Family (*Rhamnaceae*), is known for its distinctive gray-green branches with 1-2 inch thorns, particularly noticeable in winter. Lotebush, a.k.a. Gumdrop Tree, Bluebursh, or Clepe, is a multi-trunked shrub reaching about 6 feet tall. It produces inconspicuous tiny yellow flowers, which if pollinated, result in hard, gumdrop-shaped pea-sized dark fruit after pollination, eaten by wildlife. It also provides good cover for quail due to its thorny nature. The oval-shaped leaves are 1-1.5 inches long, with slightly rounded serrated edges.

See Lotebush in wooded areas on the Mary Hope Brenneke Nature Trail and Oso Loop Trail.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of December 26, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

HONG KONG ORCHID TREE (*Bauhinia blakeana*)

Coastal Bend gardeners are familiar with common tropical orchid trees, such as *Bauhinia purpurea*, which blooms nearly year-round here, but doesn't produce large numbers of seedlings like the more common light purple, pink and white varieties.

Hong Kong Orchid Tree is a strong bloomer in warm months. Mature leaves may be 4-5 inches across, providing a medium green backdrop for the large, elegant eye-catching five-petal purplish-rose flowers, also 4-5 inches across, each lasting several days. While blossoms resemble orchids at first glance, this tree is in the Pea Family (*Fabaceae*), along with mesquite and acacia trees.

Hong Kong Orchid Tree is freeze sensitive and may freeze to the ground in extremely cold weather, such as our February, 2021 freeze.



Orchid trees can reach 15-20 feet tall, typically multi-trunked. Lower limbs need to be pruned to preserve a tree-like form, preventing appearance of an overgrown bush. In South Texas, Orchid Trees sometimes are called Lavaca (Spanish for cow) Trees, because the large two-lobed leaves resemble a cow hoof.

See Hong Kong Orchid Tree just past the Sensory Garden, across from the Rock Garden.

EVE'S NECKLACE (*Sophora tomentosa*)

Eve's Necklace, a cousin of Texas Mountain Laurel, has similar-shaped compound leaves covered in silvery-green foliage due to soft plant hairs on the upper leaf surface. This multi-trunked shrub only grows 3-6 feet at maturity.

It is native to coastal regions of South Florida and South Texas only as far north as Aransas County; but also is found in coastal tropical and subtropical regions in much of the world. It may grow larger in frost-free areas, but only is freeze-tolerant to about 20°F, freezing back and re-sprouting from the base.

Eve's Necklace has cascading 4-16 inch spikes of yellow tubular flowers, opening over several weeks with bloom cycles from March until frost. A member of the Pea Family, *Fabaceae*, pollinated flowers create long seed pods which may last a year or more on the bush. Round seeds are larger than the pod producing a covered "pearl" appearance inside the light green pods, resulting in its common name. In other regions it may be called *Yellow Necklace Pod* or *Yellow Sophora*.



See Eve's Necklace in the Arid Garden, currently in bloom with yellow flowers, but without seed pods at this time.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of December 19, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

WHITE DENDROBIUM HYBRID ORCHID

Dendrobium 'Adagio White' X 'Hilo White' is a cross between two dendrobium orchid varieties producing long flower stalks of large white Dendrobium orchids, while gaining flower size from 'Adagio' and increased blossom count from 'Hilo.'

Like many dendrobiums, the tall plants prefer small pots appearing to be root-bound; but these plants are epiphytes and don't require soil. Plant stems may be 12-20 inches tall with cascades of blossoms emerging on the stems between upper leaves. Flower stalks cascading 16-24 inches are covered in large white, rounded blossoms about 2.5 inches across.

See this good winter bloomer in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, along with many other dendrobiums currently in bloom in the rear greenhouse.



YAUPON HOLLY (*Ilex vomitoria*)

Yaupon Holly is a Texas native in the holly family. Unlike traditional Chinese Holly (*Ilex cornuta*), with multi-pointed leaves we often associate with Christmas, this native holly is evergreen retaining dark green, rounded simple leaves about 1-2 inches long, with slightly rounded serrated edges. Leaves may be larger in rainier areas reportedly reaching 2-4 inches.

Yaupon Holly has separate male and female plants. The females produce small white flowers in fall, which become individual berries along the branches, maturing to bright red. Berries are most common in winter, providing significant food source for over-wintering songbirds.

It naturally is found in much of East and South Texas including the Piney Woods, Gulf Prairies and Marshes, Post Oak Savannah, Blackland Prairies, Edwards Plateau and South Texas Plains. Unfortunately, many natural stands in the Coastal Bend have been choked out by invasive species such as Brazilian Pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*).



There are no natural stands of Yaupon at the Botanical Gardens; but several have been planted near Monkey Mansion play area.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of December 12, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

'CIRCLE STAR' CATTLEYA ORCHID (*Sophrolaeliocattleya* 'Circle Star')

'Circle Star' Cattleya Orchid, originated in 2003, by crossing Cattleya 'Seagulls Apricot' x C. 'Circle of Life,' is one of many hybrid orchids bred by the late Frank Fordyce over a 61-year career.

This relatively small orchid only has pseudo bulbs and leaves usually 4-6 inches long and about $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch wide. While the plant's size may not turn heads, the rich red 3-inch blossoms do catch one's eye among the more common sea of purple and white flowering orchids, especially during the Christmas season. The lip petal and throat lack secondary tones creating solid color. Unfortunately, it typically only produces 1-3 blossoms on each flower stalk.

See this beautiful orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, still with a nice selection of fall-blooming orchids for a colorful Holiday Season.



PERENNIAL BROOMWEED (*Gutierrezia sarothrae* Asteraceae)

Perennial Broomweed, a member of the Sunflower Family (Asteraceae) is a common short-lived native perennial wildflower in South Texas scrub-brush chaparral. It naturally occurs in arid regions from South Texas to Southern California, and from Mexico north to Idaho. It also is known as False Broomweed and Broom Snakeweed.

Unlike the single-stalked annual broomweed, the perennial form has multiple sprawling branches 6-24 inches long, emerging from a woody base. Narrow, threadlike leaves produce a lacy effect. Small pale yellow to white flowers cluster at branch tops June to December. Plants go dormant as temperatures drop late January through early March. It has been reported toxic to grazing livestock after ingesting significant quantities.

See Perennial Broomweed blooming along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of December 5, 2021)

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BLUSHING STRIPED BROMELIAD (*Neoregelia Carolinae Tricolor*)

Neoregelia is a genus of epiphytic bromeliads which, like many orchids, naturally grow in treetops of tropical rainforests, looking for a place to anchor themselves. However, they don't take water or nutrients from trees to which they are attached. These bromeliads collect water in the rosette leaf formation that resembles a flattened cup.

Blushing Striped Bromeliad has strap-like leaves featuring green edges and longitudinal yellow-white center stripe running the entire length of the leaves with the center of the plant turning from light pink to deep rose-red before blooming. The actual floral structure, or inflorescence, will form in the center of the leaf rosette from which small, individual light lavender flowers emerge above the water in the cup.

See both tricolor and solid form of this blushing bromeliad featured in the Bromeliad Christmas Tree in the Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory. H-E-B provided these plants for *Holly Days at the Gardens*, for viewing through December.



CAMPHOR DAISY (*Rayjacksonia phyllocephala*)

Camphor Daisy, sometimes called Golden Aster, is a member of the Aster/Sunflower Family, *Asteraceae*. Bright yellow, daisy-shaped flowers with yellow centers about 1-inch across bloom much of the year, but particularly September-December.

Camphor Daisy can be upright or somewhat sprawling, up to 12-24 inches tall. It is recognized by its light-medium green, serrated leaves which may become more succulent with age. Both stems and leaves appear hairy; and when crushed produce a camphor scent!

An emergent annual wildflower, it often is found in poor soil areas along with its cousin, Sea Ox-Eye Daisy (*Borrchia frutescens*), naturally growing along sand dunes, wet salt flats or in pinelands and dry fields in TX, LA, FL and CO.

Pollinated flowers produce a small white fruit containing a single seed with hair-like extensions similar to a dandelion seed, which helps it disperse to nearby areas.

See Camphor Daisy blooming along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of November 28, 2021)

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GOLDEN THRYALLIS (*Galphimia glauca*)

Golden Thryallis is a semi-tropical shrub with dense bright green foliage and short spikes of golden flowers. Individual yellow flowers are only ½-inch wide with distinctive red stamen, but many flowers on each flower stalk give months of abundant golden color. Its subtle scent often is overpowered by more fragrant flowers.

Thryallis is typically evergreen here due to mild winters, but considered deciduous in colder areas of central and north Texas. Blooming nearly year-round in South Texas, it's one of the easiest landscape shrubs needing little fertilizing or pruning once established. With a dense, multi-branched informal growth pattern reaching 5-6 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide if unchecked, it can be a tall hedge or visual block.

Thryallis is a member of the family *Malpighiaceae*, which includes its Texas native cousin, Dwarf Barbados Cherry (*Malpighia glabra*). Native to Mexico and Central America, it has adapted well to Gulf Coast states.

See Thryallis in the Sensory Garden.



BLUE MISTFLOWER (*Chromolaena odoratum*)

Blue Mistflower or *Crucita* is a tall-growing form of mistflower, closely related to Padre Island Mistflower (*Conoclinium betonifolia*) and Gregg's Mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*), all in the aster/sunflower family *Asteraceae*. All of these plants used to be in the genus *Eupatorium*, but in recent years were divided into new genera. It is native from Mexico and Texas along the southern United States, into the Caribbean.

Like its cousins, Blue Mistflower has clusters of tiny light blue flowers with small thin petals which give a blue misty appearance in mass. Here, it's a native annual growing from wind-dispersed seeds. Commonly growing 2-5 feet tall with bright green pointed leaves, it makes a nice accent plant in an informal garden. These leaves have a pungent scent when crushed, which resulted in the species name *odorata*.

Blue mistflower can be perennial needing spring cutback, or an annual in hard winters, frequently reappearing nearby when seeds sprout the next year.

This plant has a wide range of common names in other areas including *Fragrant Mistflower*, *Blue Boneset*, *Fragrant Boneset*, *Jack In The Bush*, *Crucita*, *Siam Weed*, *Common Flossflower*, *Christmas Bush* and *Devilweed*.

See Blue Mistflower in the Butterfly Garden, on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden, and in pockets along the Brennecke Nature Trail, in full bloom this time of year.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of November 21, 2021)

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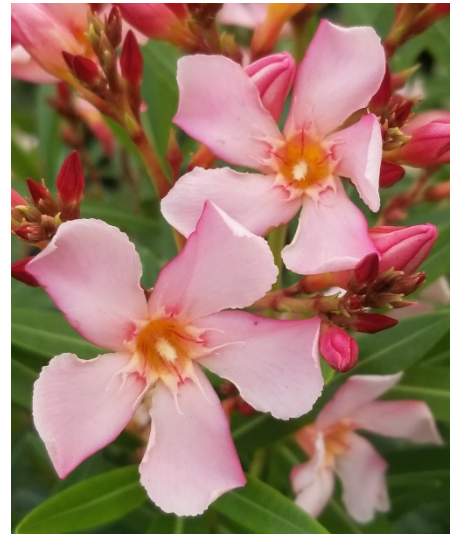
'CARNIVAL' DWARF OLEANDER (*Nerium oleander* 'Carnival')

'Carnival' is a popular dwarf oleander bred by late oleander aficionados Ted Turner, Sr. and Ted Turner, Jr., founders of Turner's Gardenland. 'Carnival' is recognized by its pleasing salmon pink petals with light yellow and pink-striped tubular centers. It retains blossoms much of the year until hard freeze. Individual flowers are only an inch across, but flower clusters make a visual floral impact lasting months once open. Dark green leaves about 4 inches long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide come to a point with smooth edges, collectively providing a rich backdrop for lighter flowers.

"Dwarf" is a relative term in horticulture circles, especially with oleanders. 'Carnival' matures at 5-7 feet tall, 4-5 feet wide. This may not seem 'dwarf' to us, but is when compared to standard oleanders reaching twenty feet!

Oleanders are toxic if ingested as are other members of the Dogbane Family (*Apocynaceae*) also including plumeria, desert rose, vinca (periwinkles), allamandas, and butterfly weeds (*Asclepias* sp.). Sap of these plants also is a skin irritant.

See 'Carnival' Oleanders to the right of the Visitors Center entry arbor. Lighter-colored 'Shari D' oleanders, another Turner's variety, also provide a hedge between the parking lot and modular Education Station.



FALL OBEDIENT PLANT (*Physostegia virginiana*)

'Fall Obedient Plant,' also known as *False Dragonhead* or *Virginia Lions-heart*, is a member of the Mint Family (*Lamiaceae*) making it a cousin of square-stemmed coleus, along with many herbs including basil, rosemary, and scented geranium.

This plant commonly has 3-4 foot single upright square stalks accentuated with uniform, dark green, lanceolate leaves usually 4-6 inches long on the entire stalk. Plants grow in clumps with stems emerging from the plant's base. Each stem becomes a flower stalk with pinkish-lavender 5-petaled tubular flowers, 2 forming an upper lip and 3 a lower lip, inspiring the false-dragonhead common name. If the flowers are bent or manipulated along the stem, they tend to stay in the new position for a while which is why it is called Obedient Plant.

Fall Obedient Plant is very adaptable tolerating both poor drainage and drought. It naturally grows along river banks, wet thickets, prairies and low lands in much of east and north Texas including clay, sand and even limestone soils. However, it is not just a Texas native, being indigenous to much of the southeast from mid-Atlantic states to Florida and west to Texas—with a range stretching from Northern Mexico up to Ontario.

See this plant, a nectar source for wildlife, in both the Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens; but most stalks are only 1-2 feet tall due to late summer pruning.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of November 14, 2021)

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CATTLEYA ROYAL BEAU 'HIHIMANU' (*Sophrocattleya* Royal Beau 'Hihimanu')

This orchid hybrid originated by H & R Nurseries in Waimanalo, Hawaii, in 1995, as a cross between *Cattleya* 'Princess Bells' and C. 'Beaufort.' 'Hihimanu' is a variation of the original cross.

It produces multiple mauve-pink blossoms 3-3.5 inches across in the traditional "corsage" orchid form for which *Cattleyas* are known. The unique color contrasts with common purple and white flowering orchids, coordinating with fall color palettes.

Be sure to see 'Hihimanu' in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory along with many other *Cattleyas* soon, as we approach the end of their prime fall bloom cycle!



ZEXMENIA (*Wedelia acapulcensis* var. *hispida*)

This native wildflower grows naturally along the Rio Grande and Coastal Plains, extending into the Edwards Plateau. *Zexmenia* provides bursts of individual golden-yellow daisy-like flowers roughly 1 inch across from spring until frost, popping up within short native grasses, preferring well-drained soils. Pointed dark green leaves about a half-inch across and 1 inch long have coarse, sandpaper-like foliage forming mounds 10-30 inches tall. If grown in shade, it flowers less and may become leggy. In other regions, it may be called *Hairy Wedelia* or *Texas Creeping Ox-Eye*. It is a member of the Aster/Sunflower Family (*Asteraceae*).

Zexmenia will freeze back in winter and may appear dead; but don't be hasty to replace it. Once warm weather returns, it quickly regrows into a new dense clump of foliage and begins flowering again.

It is an outstanding plant for butterfly gardens providing nectar for all species and serving as a host plant for caterpillars of Bordered Patch butterflies (*Chlosyne lacinia*), so expect periodic leaf damage from feeding caterpillars.

Zexmenia is one of the most readily available native plants in retail nurseries since it keeps its attractive appearance in a pot. It is extremely drought tolerant, preferring full sun, making it a good South Texas landscape plant.

See *Zexmenia* in the Butterfly Garden, on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden, and naturally in small patches of native grasses.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of November 7, 2021)

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BLACK STOCKINGS GRASS (*Pennisetum orientale* 'Black Stockings')

BLACK STOCKINGS (Napier) GRASS is a stunning, large-growing ornamental grass making a big impression in local landscapes. Revered for its wide, dark maroon leaves and fast growth, it creates a dense clump of grass that matures 7-12 feet tall depending on water availability. This ornamental grass is much larger than its well-known cousin, Purple Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum'), allowing more functional uses like a screen; or an accent amongst large shrubbery in sunny areas.

Black Stockings Grass is perennial here, but needs annual spring pruning to around 12 inches to encourage new growth next season. Doing well in arid conditions, this good Xeriscape option also was named a Texas Superstar earlier this year, with exceptional landscape performance throughout the state. Black Stockings Grass needs very little fertilizer to perform well; and too much nitrogen results in its majestic purple-tone foliage reverting to green.



See Black Stockings Grass in front of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, Sensory Garden, and in pots near the Hay Maze!

SNAPDRAGON VINE (*Maurandella antirrhiniflora*)

Snapdragon Vine is a delicate, herbaceous native vine often reaching 3-5 feet long.

Not a true snapdragon, but from a different family, *Scrophulariaceae* (Figwort Family), making it a cousin to Texas Sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*). However, its abundant blooms look similar to the traditional annual Snapdragon.

The vine grows quickly, branching to form a dense cluster of foliage resembling a blanket of bright green leaves less than an inch long, with a trifoliate shape. Small rose-purple flowers are distributed over the entire vine. Blossoms have a snapdragon-like shape, the petals resembling a dragon snout with white teeth!



Snapdragon vine naturally is found in southwestern North America from Texas to Southern California, and Utah to Northern Mexico. In nature it climbs on shrubs and hangs from rocky bluffs. Although it can cover a small nearby shrub if unchecked, it can be trained to a fence or small trellis. It is most-commonly grown from seed, which produce small, scrambling vines that die back to the ground each winter. Birds distribute the seeds. It also is the larval plant for Common Buckeye butterfly caterpillars. Unfortunately, it is not usually found in nurseries unless they specialize in Texas native plants.

See Snapdragon Vine on the fence in the EarthKind Demonstration Garden, and various places along our nature trails.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of October 17, 2021)

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CATTLEYA PORTIA ORCHID (*Cattleya Portia* 'Cannizaro')

Cattleya Portia is a primary orchid hybrid, a cross between two species, *Guarianthe bowringiana* (formerly *C. bowringiana*) x *Cattleya labiata*. The Royal Horticultural Society also accepts the name *Cattlianthe Portia*. Many *Cattleya* experts consider it to be among the finest and most spectacular *Cattleya* hybrids ever bred!

Cattleya Portias are intermediate size between parents, with 7-12 striking brilliant purple blossoms on tall heads above the pseudo bulbs. Flowers are about 3.5 inches wide with darker purple lip and golden yellow throat highlight. Flower stems often produce a cluster of 8-12 blossoms with multiple stalks seen on larger plants. Flowering plants can reach 24-30 inches tall.



For those wanting an easy orchid with consistent blooming, this is a great option, gaining the heavy fall blooming characteristic from *Gur. bowringiana* (a.k.a. 'Autumn Pixie' Orchid).

Registered by James Veitch & Son in 1897, and *C. Portia* by H.G. Alexander in 1927, both received many awards from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and American Orchid Society (AOS). *Cattleya Portia* 'Cannizaro,' received Award of Merit (AM) from RHS in 1936, and AOS in 1951.

See many C. Portia examples, including large specimens in hanging baskets, currently in bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, greeting guests with an impressive explosion of color.

BLANKET FLOWER (*Gaillardia pulchella* 'Arizona Red Shades')

Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia grandiflora*) is a common wildflower throughout Texas. The native form is known for its dark rounded center and single row of bright red petals with distinctive yellow serrated edges, also resulting in other common names like Firewheel, Indian Blanket, and 'Girasol Rojo' in Spanish. 'Arizona Red Shades' hybrid *Gaillardia* has dense leaf growth and large, dark red flowers with traditional *Gaillardia* shape.

Blanket Flower is a member of the *Asteraceae* family, along with daisies, asters, cosmos and sunflowers. These plants are noted for their ray flower formation with dense center resembling an eye, or 'disc flower' radiating out with colorful petals attracting pollinators. The center is actually a composite of many tiny flowers which allows for multiple nectar sources-- a great plant for butterflies.

Plants only grow 12-24 inches tall with mossy green leaves covered with tiny hairs sometimes giving it a sticky feeling. *Gaillardia* are hardy annuals earning the 'Proven Winners' designation, growing well in gardens around the US.



See Arizona Red Shades in the Butterfly Garden.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of October 10, 2021)

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BASKET OF FIRE Ornamental Pepper (*Capsicum annuum* 'Basket of Fire')

"Basket of Fire" actually is bred for hanging baskets, and is edible (*keep reading*), thriving in extreme summer heat and moderate fall temperatures. It does produce small, white star-shaped flowers, but the show is the fruit! It produces hundreds of peppers, most colorful in cooler temperatures. The 1-2 inch fruit starts out a creamy color changing to yellow, later orange, finally bright red fully mature.

Peppers have a *Scoville* heat rating of approximately 80,000shu—10-30 times hotter than most jalapenos, and 1-3 times hotter than cayenne peppers! Its hardiness and prolific fruiting earned it the Texas Superstar designation by Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service in 2018.

"Basket of Fire" matures about 12 inches tall, but unlike most peppers, spreads with cascading branches up to 20 inches. Although originally grown in a hanging basket, it can adapt to most well-drained soils.

See this Superstar in the Sensory Garden raised bed.



ORANGE MAHOGANY ESPERANZA (*Tecoma stans* 'Orange Mahogany')

Orange Mahogany Esperanza attracts both migrating hummers and butterflies. Orange Mahogany is similar to the native orange and yellow forms found in Northern Mexico and West Texas, but with thinner, pointed leaves, and narrow bell-shaped flowers.

The 'mahogany' name comes from bronzy colors of the throat when blooming, most prolifically in fall. The darker colors provide a contrast to traditional yellow forms. Plants usually grow 6-7 feet tall, but can be kept 3-5 feet with annual spring pruning. It prefers well drained clay or sandy soils.

See Orange Mahogany Esperanza in the Hummingbird Garden.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of October 3, 2021)

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MARCO POLO PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Marco Polo')

Plumeria are popular tropical specimens in Coastal Bend gardens with Marco Polo being a consistent and prolific blooming multicolor variety with spirited fragrance. Added to the Botanical Gardens Collection by the Plumeria Society of South Texas after the freeze, this plant's blooms definitely will turn your head with stunning 3-4 inch flowers blending from orange-yellow centers to shades of pink with dark petal edges. The thick petals almost appear to be painted! Warm weather results in more orange tones popping from the centers. Cooler weather means more pink and yellow shades, resembling Plumeria 'Jenny.'



Plumeria need full sun and well-drained soil. They can be grown in pots, but need regular fertilization. If planted in the ground, they should be removed and stored inside during winter, or at least planted in a sheltered area. Marco Polo is cold sensitive below 40 degrees F.

See Marco Polo and other plumeria still blooming in the Plumeria Garden, but plan to visit in October. The Plumeria Society will be stripping leaves, October 30, and moving plants to winter storage, November 6.

AUTUMN SAGE (*Salvia greggii*)

Autumn Sage is native to central and southwest Texas, into Mexico, growing naturally in rocky calcareous soils, but able to grow in improved soils and good drainage. This plant is sometimes called *Cherry Sage* or *Gregg's Sage*, the species named after Southwest botanist Josiah Gregg (1806-1850) who first described it.

This Texas native has small clusters of blooms usually with 1 to 3 blossoms open at the end of any branch, each tiny tube-like blossom looking like a double bottom lip. Autumn sage comes in a variety of colors including reds, pinks, and white. Plants are typically 12-36 inches tall with narrow, simple light green leaves typically ½-¾ inch long. Regular fertilizer and periodic pruning, particularly a hard annual spring pruning, will help plants develop dense growth, where heavy shade and infrequent trimming or fertilizing may result in a scraggly plant. A member of the mint family *Lamiaceae*, there are a wide range of other salvias used in Texas butterfly and hummingbird gardens. The fall bloom cycle makes a good nectar plant for fall hummingbird and butterfly migrations.



See 'Cherry Red' Autumn Sage in the Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens, with a dark pink 'Lipstick' variety on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of September 26, 2021)

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BRAZILIAN BUTTON FLOWER (*Centratherum punctatum*)

Brazilian Button Flower, a fast-growing tender perennial, is frequently appearing in butterfly gardens! Originally described as native to the Philippines and Australia, the same plant is found in Central America and Columbia, known as *Manaus Beauty*, named after the capital of the Brazilian state of Amazonas. In other regions, it's often called *Brazilian Batchelor Buttons*, *Larkdaisy* or *Porcupine Flower*.

Brazilian Button Flowers, a member of the Aster/Sunflower family (*Asteraceae*), are 18-24 inches tall, spreading 2-4 feet. Medium green leaves are elliptical, coarsely-toothed, contrasting with 1-inch bluish-purple flowers appearing at branch tips. Blossoms resemble a flattened globe with many tiny petals making it appear prickly, thus the name *porcupine flower*. In fact, the genus name (*Centratherum*) comes from the Greek *kentron*, meaning a spur and *antheros*, meaning a barb or spine, both describing the flower.

These butterfly nectar plants flower late spring through fall in our area, readily reseeding, possibly appearing in unexpected places, sometimes becoming a nuisance in warm climates.

See Brazilian Button Flowers in the Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens.



FIREBUSH (*Hamelia patens*)

Firebush is a subtropical shrub native to Central and South America, and Florida. However, biotic borders don't always match state boundaries, and *Hamelia*'s presence in the Tamaulipian Biotic Province, including South Texas, puts it on some Texas native plant lists. While Firebush is the most frequently-used name in the nursery industry, it also is called *Hummingbird Bush*, *Scarlet Bush*, and *Redhead*.

Plants are known for bronze foliage when grown in full sun, probably resulting in the name Firebush. Slightly hairy leaves can be 3-6 inches long, arranged in whorls for a circular orientation on stems. While foliage is vibrant, *Hamelia* readily produces clusters of narrow tubular inch-long orange flowers at the tips of branches in summer and fall, providing nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies. This plant needs little trimming to remain in bloom in warm months.

Hamelia, in the *Rubiacea* or *Madder* Family, is a great perennial for Texas, an early Texas Superstar designee by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Moderately freeze-sensitive, it survives light frosts, but freezes to the base after a hard freeze, rapidly coming back from the trunk, reaching 6-8 feet tall. Compact or dwarf varieties are becoming readily available with smaller leaves and flowers, typically only 4-5 feet tall.

See Firebush in Butterfly, Hummingbird and EarthKind Demonstration Gardens.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of September 19, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

'DIAMOND HEAD' DENDROBIUM ORCHID

(*Dendrobium Diamond Head Beauty* X *Dendrobium Compactum*)

This absolutely stunning orchid is a cross between the original *Dendrobium* 'Diamond Head' variety and the species *Dendrobium compactum*. The result is the large profuse flowering of 'Diamond Head Beauty' and the more compact form of *D. compactum*.

Flower stalks cascading 12-20 inches are covered in bright purple blossoms each about 2-2.5 inches with a dark purple throat. It blooms consistently in the fall with flower stalks often lasting more than 2 months!

See this beautiful orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory along with many other dendrobiums which bloom throughout the year.



DWARF BARBADOS CHERRY (*Malpighia glabra*)

Native Dwarf Barbados Cherry also goes by common names *Wild Crepe Myrtle*, *Acerola* and *Manzanita*. It naturally grows in thickets, brush land and palm groves from South Texas through Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean to South America as far as Peru and Brazil.

This upright shrub, in the *Malpighiaceae* or *Barbados Cherry* family, creates rounded dense growth of delicate foliage and easily can be trimmed into a traditional landscape shrub with plants typically growing 3-6 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide, preferring well-drained soils. It is one of the more popular Texas natives in retail nurseries due to its dense growth habit and ability to look good and bloom consistently in a pot.



It develops into a thick, rounded canopy of fairly delicate foliage. Dainty pink flowers appear March through November. Petals begin narrow but expand with frilly edges giving a lacey appearance similar to crepe myrtle flowers. About a month after flowering, bright red 1-inch fruits appear, tart-tasting and high in vitamin C. Butterflies nectar on flowers while small birds (and humans) feed on fruit.

See Dwarf Barbados Cherry in the Butterfly Garden near the Caterpillar Topiary.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of September 12, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

PLUMERIA 'GINA' (*Plumeria rubra* 'Gina')

Plumeria are constant favorite flowers for semi-tropical areas, but are freeze sensitive as many of us were reminded last February! Plumeria are members of the *Apocynaceae* Family, as are Desert Rose, Oleanders, and annual Vinca.

July through September is peak plumeria bloom season here with these plants thriving in hot, sunny conditions. 'Gina' is one of the most striking varieties currently flowering—a heavy bloomer with burgundy-red flowers contrasting with creamy white upturned edges. In cooler weather, flowers may have a coppery-orange color. 'Gina' is known for not fading, its long blooming cycle, along with a mild, spicy fragrance, stronger in evening.

'Gina' in our collection is currently about 4-5 feet tall but will get much larger, creating an ornamental, tropical tree with 2-3 more years of growth, protection from freezing temperatures, and pruning. Normally, plumeria in "the Grove" now would be 6-10 feet tall. But sizes vary this year, as many plants were replaced after February's freeze.

The Plumeria Society of South Texas maintains the Plumeria Garden, with an abundance of colors and varieties. Make plans this month or October to enjoy these tropical treasures before being dug and placed in winter storage early November through early March.



SILVERLEAF NIGHTSHADE (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*)

Also known by common names *White Horse Nettle*, *Tomato Weed*, or *Trompillo*, Silverleaf Nightshade is a deep-rooted, heat-loving perennial native to the Americas, widely naturalized in other tropical regions. It is considered an invasive weed in semi-arid regions including India, Australia, South Africa, Pacific Islands and parts of the U.S.

Upright plants with few branches, typically growing 1-2 feet tall, have silvery triangular leaves $\frac{3}{4}$ -1½ inches wide, up to 4 inches long. Silverleaf Nightshade has consistent flowering most of the year with five-petaled blue, star-shaped flowers featuring a center cluster of bright yellow stamen. While blue-violet is the most common color, there also are lighter blue and occasional white variations. After flowering, small round green fruit appear, eventually turning yellow-orange.

Silverleaf Nightshade, known to be toxic to cattle, with hallucinogenic and paralytic effects in humans, is a member of the Solonaceae Family, commonly called the Nightshade or Potato Family, also including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and potatoes.

See Silverleaf Nightshade in the Hummingbird Garden, and various native habitats near the Arid Garden.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of September 5, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

ROSY JEWEL ORCHID (*Cattleytonia* 'Rosy Jewel')

Cattleytonia 'Rosy Jewel' (also known as *Guaritonias* Rosy Jewel) is an orchid hybrid originally developed in 1956 by W.W.G. Moir. It is a "primary hybrid", a cross between 2 species, *Guarionthe bowringiana* x *Broughtonia sanguinea*.

Medium purple blossoms, 2.5-3 inches across, appear in clusters of 5-10 on top of a pseudo-bulb, making a bold statement blooming in late summer/early fall. Relatively broad petals create a full, nearly circular bloom. Individual petals are medium purple with slightly darker veins, and a darker lower lip with a white and yellow throat.

When not in bloom, green pseudo-bulb leaves reproduce filling a pot in a couple of years. Each pseudo-bulb blooms only once, so the more new shoots you see, the more flowers you likely will have each fall. But old "leaves" should not be removed unless completely dead, since they are the carbohydrate source for flowering and new shoot production.

See this outstanding orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, starting its fall bloom cycle slightly earlier this year.



MEXICAN FLAME VINE

(*Pseudogynoxys chenopodioides*, formerly *Senecio confusus*)

This Mexico native is sold as a native in South Texas since it resides in the Tamaulipan Biotic Province, which knows no political boundaries. Common names include *Mexican Love Vine* or *Orange-glow Vine*.

A member of the sunflower/aster family *Asteraceae*, clusters of blossoms including orange petals and orange/yellow stamen/pistils produce the frilly effect of individual blossoms resembling dancing flames. This twisted collection of flower styles may have been the reason it was given the original species name "*confusus*." Profusions of flame-colored flower clusters cover the vine in summer, providing nectar for a wide range of butterfly species, blooming all summer and well into the fall.



Once established, vines quickly can grow 6-15 feet in a year, twisting around fences, poles or trellises for support. Bright green, semi-succulent leaves are nearly triangular with pointed edges, like a softer version of a holly leaf. The thick leaves of the plants and drought tolerance make them a great Xeriscape selection. However, these plants are particularly susceptible to root rot and will die if standing in water after heavy rains. They are root hardy to 20°F, but will die back to woody stems or roots if temperatures drop below freezing.

See Mexican Flame Vine in the Butterfly House, and on trellises in the Earthkind Demonstration Garden.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of August 29, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

'GREEN ORCHID' (*Grammatophyllum scriptum citrinum*)

Grammatophyllum scriptum citrinum orchid species is native to Borneo, the Philippines, Fiji and New Guinea. This specimen plant has small yellow-green blossoms on large flower spikes sometimes 30-42 inches long! Fragrant flowers will last 6-8 weeks—an extended summer showstopper when few orchids are blooming. Broad green ovate leaves are present until cold weather forces rapid leaf drop, growing back quickly when warm temperatures return.

These unique orchids have two distinct types of roots for different purposes. Normal thick roots grow down into the medium, functioning like other orchids' roots. Thinner white roots are found all along the surface of the pot creating a "hairy" appearance. In nature, these roots catch debris such as leaves which decompose to feed the plant. These small roots should never be forced into the orchid growing medium.



Grow 'green orchids' with medium to warm temps, good medium to high light, and plenty of water when in growth and flowering.

See this spectacular orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.

COMMON FALSE MALLOW (*Malvastrum coromandelianum*)

This wildflower grows abundantly in South Texas' Rio Grande Plains and Coastal Plains, found in loam and clay soils, in sunny openings, stream bottoms, and roadsides. Extremely drought tolerant, it thrives in full sun or partial shade. While not believed to be indigenous, it definitely has naturalized throughout Texas, reaching into Louisiana and Florida, and much of Mexico and Central America.

False Mallow produces abundant flowers except during cold winter months. Blossoms are ½ to ¾-inch flowers with 5 pale cream-color petals. This hardy member of the hibiscus and cotton family (*Malvaceae*) keeps its simple grayish-green, slightly hairy leaves with serrated edges leaves year-round. Plants may be upright growing as tall as 18 inches, or take a sprawling form only growing a few inches from the ground, especially in mowed areas.



Common False Mallow offers nectar for butterflies and pollen for bees with consistent summer flowering when other wildflowers may be suffering from heat.

See Common False Mallow along the Brennecke Nature Trail; while a close look of mowed fields near the Arid Garden and Oso Ridge reveals its smaller sprawling groundcover version.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of August 22, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

MARGARITA MIX MOSS ROSE (*Portulacca grandiflora* 'Margarita Mix')

Moss Rose (*Portulacca grandiflora*), is a drought and heat tolerant annual, native to hot, dry plains of Argentina, southern Brazil, and Uruguay, and well adapted to our hot, dry summers. Its low-growing multi-branching form is a good choice for hanging baskets or as a dense-growing summer annual. The succulent leaves provide drought and sun-tolerance, even in height of South Texas summer heat. Although not required, regular fertilization will help it remain full, blooming more frequently.

Flowers open in bright sunlight, closing near sunset, viable only for outdoor use. Although most commonly-known here as *Moss Rose*, it has multiple common names in other regions including *eleven o'clock*, *Mexican rose*, *sun rose*, *rock rose*. Margarita Mix includes several bright colors--yellow, pink, red, purple, orange and white.



Sometimes confused with its succulent cousin Purslane, *Portulacca* has smaller almost tubular leaves, and semi-double flowers with more petals; while Purslane has flatter, wider leaves and usually single blossoms.

Moss Rose needs long days and warm temperatures, thriving as a summer annual. In winter, plants drop leaves and stop blooming, susceptible to insects and rot, especially if overwatered.

See Moss Rose 'Margarita Mix' along walkways to the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory and on our Butterfly Topiary.

WHITE TURK'S CAP (*Malvaviscus aroreus* var. *drummondii*)

Turk's Cap, named a Texas Superstar Plant by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for its adaptability in state-wide garden trials, is one of the best known Texas natives in the Cotton/Hibiscus family (*Malvaceae*). Usually red, it comes in other variations, white being newly marketed. While red Turk's Cap appears naturally in South Texas, white rarely does. The white flower color gene is most likely recessive, usually masked by the red gene.

Like its red counterpart, white Turk's Cap flowers about 1-2 inches long emerge from branch tips but petals never fully unfurl, looking like rolled paper. Yellow pollen on fused stamen and pistil are seen protruding past the petals. Pollinated flowers produce 1-inch round green fruit which eventually ripen red. Turk's Cap is an understory plant frequently growing in light shade, but can grow in full sun, reaching 3-5 feet tall and about 3 feet wide. It grows best in well drained soils with organic matter but can adapt to poorer soils.



It is an excellent wildlife food source, providing nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies, moths and other insects. The fruit also are eaten by mammals including humans. The fruit reportedly has a faint apple taste and can be eaten cooked or raw, according the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (www.wildflower.org).

Turk's Cap has a wide range of common names including *Drummond Turk's Cap*, *Drummond's Wax Mallow*, *Red Mallow*, *Texas Mallow*, *Mexican Apple*, *Sleeping Hibiscus*, *Bleeding Hearts*. The most common Spanish name is *Manzanita* meaning "little apple," referring to its small fruit.

See White Turk's Cap in the Butterfly Garden by the bridge to the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of August 15, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

PLUMERIA RUBRA 'NANCY AMES'

Plumeria always are favorite flowers in semi-tropical areas like the Coastal Bend. Named for a founder of the Plumeria Society of America, 'Nancy Ames' petals are dark to medium pink near the edge, pale pink toward the center, eventually turning bright yellow with a slightly orange throat. A clone of a seedling from 'Duke', a darker red form with yellow orange centers on each blossom, 'Nancy Ames' blossoms have a light sweet fragrance. It's a good bloomer this summer and a new addition to the Botanical Gardens' collection.

Plumeria need full sun and well-drained soil. They can be grown in pots, but need regular fertilization. Highly freeze-sensitive, if planted in the ground, they should be removed and stored inside during winter, or protected from winter winds by planting on a building's south side.

Members of the Plumeria Society of South Texas, founded in 1993, established "The Grove", dedicated with early Gardens' exhibits in 1996, continuing to curate and maintain it. Plumeria are in full bloom in late summer, blossoming less nearing November, when the Society strips leaves and pulls out plants to be green-housed bare-root for winter.

'Nancy Ames' is one of about 90 plumeria featured in the Plumeria Garden, which includes a ramp leading to the Willoughby Viewing Platform.



AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY (*Callicarpa Americana*)

American Beautyberry--one native readily available in nurseries--is a songbird magnet, coming into full glory moving closer to September. Clusters of tiny white/light pink flowers along the stem that opened in May-July, pollinated by butterflies and bees, have transformed into clusters of berries next to each set of opposite leaves along the stem. Later in August and September, berries will mature changing from green to striking bright purple. It's an understory shrub commonly growing 4-7 feet tall, and 3-4 feet wide. Large slightly hairy leaves are pointed with serrated edges, 2-3 inches wide and 3-6 inches long.

American Beautyberry is widely distributed throughout southeastern United States stretching from North Carolina to Florida, west to Texas, up into Missouri and Tennessee.

See Beautyberry in the Sensory Garden, and on Butterfly Hill.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of August 8, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

SAPPHIRE SHOWERS DURANTA (*Duranta erecta* 'Sapphire Showers')

'Sapphire Showers' Duranta is a profuse summer blooming semi-tropical shrub here in South Texas. *Duranta erecta*, also called *Brazilian Sky Flower* due to the light blue or white color of the wild form, is native to much of South and Central America, as well as Caribbean Islands. 'Sapphire Showers' cultivar was selected for dense growth habit and striking dark purple flowers with white edges.

Known for fast growth in warm weather, this dense shrub has small, glossy green leaves providing a great backdrop to its profusion of blossoms. A good pollinator plant, flowers attract a wide range of butterflies for nectar and bees for pollen. Bright yellow berries commonly appear after flower pollination which resulted in an alternate common name, *Golden Dew Drop*. It was named a 'Texas Superstar Plant' by Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension due to its adaptability and successful growth in trial gardens throughout the state. Freeze resilient, it came back from the base after February's hard cold snap!

This plant needs space. While 'Sapphire Showers' is sometimes described as compact, it easily can grow 6-9 feet tall, with graceful spreading branches. Annual spring pruning to 1-2 feet will help keep it shorter.

See Sapphire Showers in our Entry Gateway and Butterfly Garden.



RATTLEBUSH (*Sesbania drummondii*)

Also known as *Rattlebox*, this Texas native has a pendulous collection of yellow blossoms hanging between leaves. Like other members of the Pea Family (*Fabaceae*), a seed pod forms after pollination, but internal bean seeds are loose at maturity allowing the pods to "rattle" when shaken. Plants primarily bloom from June-September with seed pods in fall. Our example is just starting to bloom for this season.

Rattlebush can grow 6-10 feet tall with smooth green to light gray/brown bark depending on branch age. Compound leaves 4-8 inches across are attached alternately along the stem, each with 20-50 small leaflets providing a delicate, frilly appearance from a distance.

This plant is indigenous to the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas, as well as Arkansas. It was named for Scottish botanist Thomas Drummond (1790-1835) who collected and documented more than 750 Texas plants between Galveston and the Edwards Plateau.

See Rattlebush, a newcomer to the Botanical Gardens, in our Sensory Garden for auditory exploration beyond its visual and textile qualities.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of August 1, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

RANGOON CREEPER (*Quisqualis indica*)

Rangoon Creeper is one of the most stunning hummingbird vines available, with color-changing blossoms adding to its beauty! Tubular flowers 3-4" long are found in clusters along the ends of branches. Blossoms initially open white, becoming pink then dark red, an adaptation increasing chances of pollination by moths and hummingbirds.

This plant needs space! Flowers contrast with rich green leaves, 1-2" wide and 4" long, appearing in opposite arrangement along stems. Its vigorous vine can reach 20', creeping along looking for things on which to intertwine for support, overtaking nearby trees or shrubs if not kept in check.

While considered tropical, *Rangoon Creeper* is root-hardy into the upper teens, dying back in harsh winters, reemerging from the base. Established, it also is drought tolerant, making it both beautiful and hardy, a great addition in a tropical space.

Rangoon Creeper is a member of the Indian Almond or White Mangrove family (*Combretaceae*) along with about 500 other species native to the South East Asian Islands and East African Coast.



See a beautiful specimen in the Hummingbird Garden!

COMMON SUNFLOWER (*Helianthus annuus*)

Common Sunflower is a familiar native whose benefits may be overlooked. While the large flowering hybrids are sought for abundance of seeds, the smaller flowering wild forms also are important for wildlife.

When water is abundant, plants quickly grow 6-8' tall, making them a nuisance if in the wrong place. However, dedicating a spot for them will provide nectar for adult butterflies, leaves for caterpillars, pollen for bees, and seeds for migratory songbirds. In South Texas, Common Sunflower is the larval plant for Bordered Patch (*Chlosyne lacinia*), American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*), and Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) caterpillars.

To us, the golden-yellow petals and dark brown centers appear to be a single flower. But butterflies see the dark centers of the sunflower, and its relatives in the *Asteraceae* Family which also have this ray-flower configuration, as hundreds of individual flowers available for nectar at a single landing --an efficient feeding site!



See Sunflowers in the Butterfly Garden and Butterfly Hill as well as periodic specimens along the Nature Trails.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of July 25, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

'EVERYTHING NICE' ORCHID (*Brassolaeliocattleya*)

Brassolaeliocattleya 'Everything Nice' is a hybrid of *Rhyncholaeliocattleya Memoria Helen Brown* and *Brassavola perrinii*, producing an unusual pale yellow to chartreuse flower with a lighter lip. Cattleya orchids and their *Brassolaeliocattleya* hybridized cousins are relatively easy to grow, producing a cluster of pseudobulbs, which the average person considers leaves. Each pseudobulb produces 3-5 blossoms about 3.5 inches across. Like other orchids, these plants only flower once on each pseudobulb, with many more of these types of orchids expected to bloom late September through November.

See 'Everything Nice' in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



Common Day Flower (*Commelina erecta*)

Common Day flower is a wildflower, working well as a groundcover blooming nearly year-round. Found in most of the continental United States, especially the south, Common Day Flower is a vigorous grower, like other *Commelina* species. The 3-petal flowers consist of 2 upper blue petals and a lower white "lip" petal resulting in an alternate common name of *Whitemouth Dayflower*. The slightly fuzzy green leaves resemble wide grass blades about an inch wide and several inches long.

It grows so well, many consider it a weed, springing up where you don't expect or want it. Its common occurrence also results in another name of *Common Spiderwort*. If appearing where unwanted, it needs to be dug, removing the central growing point from which all branches radiate. This plant is in the same genus as many of those hanging basket plants known as Wandering Jews.

See Day Flower along the nature trail, in the Butterfly Garden, and occasionally in unwanted spaces among tropicals near the Visitor Center.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of July 18, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

SPICY RED JATROPH (*Jatropha integerrima*)

Spicy Red Jatropha offers long-lasting summer color in a compact tropical shrub! A popular landscape shrub, some froze back in February, but most regrew from the base, and are starting to blossom. Half-inch, five-petal red or dark pink flowers with bright yellow stamen create much larger clusters of color guaranteed to brighten up a landscape. Flowering continues most of the year except in cold seasons.

Jatropha can reach 6-8-feet tall, but periodic severe pruning keeps them shorter. Mature plants have medium to dark green three-lobed leaves 3-4 inches long providing great background for brilliant flower clusters.

Spicy Red Jatropha, originally from Cuba, is a member of the Spurge Family (*Euphorbiaceae*), along with other kissing cousins like Crown of Thorns, poinsettias, and crotons. Like other spurges, Spicy Red Jatropha is adapted to full or partial sun and is fairly drought-resilient, making it a great addition to a Xeriscape garden seeking a tropical flair.

See both potted and planted Spicy Jatropha in the patio area near the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



SHOWY ZEPHYRLILY (*Zephyranthes pulchella*)

Showy Zephyrlily, also called Golden Rain Lily, are recognized by showy bright yellow flowers that magically seem to appear after rain. Flowers, lasting only a few days, have 6 petals on a 12-inch leafless stem emerging from a bulb otherwise unnoticed. If pollinated, a 3-lobed seed pod will form at the tip with black paper-like seed inside. Smooth green grass-like leaves also appear after flowering. This wildflower native to Texas and Louisiana provides a welcome surprise to fields and flowerbeds after strong precipitation.

Most of the year, the plant has a couple of thin strap-like leaves that mix in with grass blades without being noticed; or the leafless bulb lies dormant under soil. Heavy rain triggers flowering, a beneficial adaptation since pollinator activity increases after rains. Its white-flowering cousin, Cooper's White Rainlily (*Cooperi drummondii*), also is seen after heavy rains. Both are members of the Lily Family (*Liliaceae*).

Visit soon to see Showy Zephyrlilies near the drainage swale on the south side of the Rose Garden, and Monkey Mansion entrance. Its post-rain blooming cycle is short!



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of July 11, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

GIANT PIPEVINE (*Aristolochia gigantea*)

Spectacular flowers of the Giant Pipevine (also known as *Brazilian Dutchman's Pipe*) provide a dramatic 'wow factor' entering the **Butterfly House**! These impressive maroon blooms with ivory veins on this rapidly-growing vine typically are 5-8 inches across with rare reports of flowers up to 2 feet across! Dark flowers sharply contrast against bright green heart-shaped leaves.

The common name, *Dutchman's Pipe* refers to flower shape resembling Meershaun smoking pipes once used in Europe. Looking at the back side of the giant blossom, you'll see the bottom of the "pipe" which also looks like a pelican pouch, producing another common name, *Pelican Flower*. The smaller-flowering version of the *Aristolochia* species looks more like the old-fashioned smoking pipe.

The larger of the *Aristolochia* species are larval plants for Swallowtail butterflies (*Battus philenor*), but this giant flowering form will not provide food for them, and can kill caterpillars if they eat it. However, the local Laurel Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio palamedes*) will lay eggs on this vine. Flies attracted by the flower's scent crawl inside the pocket-forming petals and pollinate the pistil hidden within.

BEWARE: This plant is extremely toxic to humans and animals, with plants of this genus containing a renal toxin known as "aristolochic acid."



FLAME ACANTHUS (*Anisacanthus quadrifidus* var. *wrightii*)

Bright orange tubular blossoms of Flame Acanthus give the illusion of a burning bush, definitely one Central Texas native you can warm up to, attracting both hummingbirds and butterflies.

The thin bright green inch-long leaves contrast nicely with the 1.5 to 2-inch dark orange blooms with two-lipped petals present mid-summer through fall, especially after rains. The woody stems of this plant allow it to grow 3-4 feet tall, but it can be pruned in spring to keep height in check. Flame acanthus can be deciduous, losing leaves in cold weather, but not during mild winters in South Texas. If it goes dormant, be patient, it will slowly re-leaf in spring.

This member of the Acanthus Family (*Acanthaceae*) is a great Xeriscape plant, being naturally drought and heat tolerant. Natural distribution runs from the Edwards Plateau and West Texas into Northern Mexico; but the general species extends south to Oaxaca in Southern Mexico. The variety name "Wrightii", the former species name (*A. wrightii*), was given for world-wide botanical collector Charles Wright (1811-1885) who collected extensively in Texas, Cuba and his native state of Connecticut.

It is the larval plant of Janais or Crimson Patch (*Chlosyne janais*), Texas Crescent (*Junonia coenia*), and Common Buckeye (*Anthanassa texana*) butterflies, so expect caterpillars to appear on these plants in late summer.

See Flame Acanthus in the Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of June 27, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

BASHAM'S PARTY PINK CREPE MYRTLE

(*Lagerstroemia* X 'Basham's Party Pink')

Basham's Party Pink Crepe Myrtle, usually shortened to *Basham Crepe Myrtle*, is one of the largest-growing crepe myrtle trees in our area, reaching 20-30 feet at maturity with a 15-20 foot canopy! Native to China and Southeast Asia, Crepe Myrtles are members of the Loosestrife Family (*Lythraceae*) in several sizes from 3-30 feet tall at maturity.

'Basham' variety actually is a hybrid of two different species, *Lagerstroemia indica* crossed with *L. fauriei*. The result is a fast-growing form with "fun-tastic" mauve pink flower clusters. Blossoms frequently fall in the breeze leaving a blanket of purplish-pink floral confetti on sidewalks and lawns. This only occurs in summer as crepe myrtles are long-day photoperiodic plants, blooming in response to extended days around the summer solstice. Large, dark green leaves provide shade from spring through late fall, but being deciduous, they drop leaves for winter. *Basham* has distinctive peeling grey/tan bark exposing reddish-brown trunks beneath. Basham Crepe Myrtles did well after the February freeze, designated a Zone 8 plant by USDA, surviving to 10 degrees.

Basham's Party Pink Crepe Myrtle, considered the granddaddy of Texas hybrid crepe myrtles, was introduced in 1965 by Texas plantsman, Lynn Lowrey. Its outstanding performance throughout the state for more than 55 years earned it the Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service's Texas Superstar designation.

See Basham Crepe Myrtle in full bloom along the Botanical Gardens parking area in front of Education Station, and in the Sensory Garden.



TROPICAL SAGE (*Salvia coccinea*)

Our native *Tropical Sage*, a member of the Mint Family (*Lamiaceae*) is one of the easiest plants to grow, perennial here and important butterfly and hummingbird nectar source. Known for its square stems, bright green spade-shaped leaves, and of course tubular scarlet flowers less than 1 inch long, the native form many grow tall and leggy, reaching 4-5 feet in shady areas, but shorter in sun. If too tall, cutting back to 4-6 inches will grow new branches.

In other regions, Tropical Sage may be known as 'Scarlet Sage,' 'Blood Sage,' or 'Indian Fire.' New compact or dwarf commercial cultivars such as 'Forest Fire Red' and 'Lady in Red' have been developed, only 18-30 inches tall. 'White Nymph' and 'Pink Nymph' also are commercially available.

Tropical sage is technically annual, but can grow perennially into USDA Zone 8, making it a good perennial for the Coastal Bend (Zone 9). Naturally, it grows primarily in sandy coastal Regions from Texas east to Florida and up into South Carolina. Plants flower almost continuously in warm weather, but they also seed; so expect additional salvias to pop up in nearby beds and concrete seams providing unexpected pockets of color!

See Tropical Sage in Earthkind Demonstration, Hummingbird and Butterfly Gardens, and possibly in small pockets along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of June 20, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

'BENGAL TIGER' CANNA LILY (*Canna americanallis* 'Bengal Tiger')

Canna lilies are among the easiest landscape plants, and 'Bengal Tiger' one of the most striking cultivars! Showy bright green leaves up to 12 inches long and 6 inches wide, with yellow variegation stripes make the plant a beautiful specimen even without flowering. Bright orange, long-lasting flowers with 3-inch wide petals emerge from the top of the stem, with clusters of blooms all summer.

Cannas have their own plant family, *Cannaceae*, which like moist soils rich in organic matter, but also readily grow in our heavy clay soils or sand. They tolerate standing in water or occasional dry spells, making them a good choice in our region. Besides soil-tolerance, they have adapted to a wide range of light, growing in full sun or partial shade.

Also the larval plant for Brazilian Skipper butterflies, these small butterflies lay eggs on the broad leaves. Caterpillars emerge to eat part of the leaves before rolling over a portion of the leaf, creating protection as they pupate into adult butterflies. So while great for a butterfly garden, cannas may not work well in a manicured garden because of potential leaf damage. But after flowering, adult plants with damaged leaves can be cut back near the ground and one or more new plants will emerge creating a new generation. In just 2-3 years, a single plant quickly can multiply to a clump to divide into new plants to share, or left to form a large mass.

See 'Bengal Tiger' Cannas in the Butterfly Garden.



TEXAS OR WILD POINSETTIA (*Euphorbia cyathophora*)

Texas Poinsettia (*Euphorbia cyathophora*) is a small, wild native poinsettia closely related to the traditional Christmas poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*), both members of the Spurge Family (*Euphorbiaceae*) with other succulents like Crown of Thorns (*Euphorbia milii*) and Pencil Cactus (*Euphorbia tirucalli*). This native, with a variety of common names including *Desert Poinsettia*, *Mexican Fireplant*, *Painted Euphorbia*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Paint Leaf*, and *Kaliko plant*, is one of the modest old-fashioned, tough plants found throughout South and Central Texas, into Mexico. It creates a colorful patchwork of green, scalloped alternate leaves with a noticeable red blotch at the base of each of the bracts which touch the base of the flower.



True flowers of both wild and traditional varieties are bulbous yellow or green structures, technically called "cyathia," which we think of as the blossom's center. The colorful portion often incorrectly called petals are really bracts—colorful leaves near the true flower that keep color for extended periods to attract pollinators. Our wild poinsettias are classified as annuals, but they may "perennialize" and last multiple years in warm climates with mild winters.

Plants will mature at 1-3 feet in height depending on water availability and light conditions. Plants are just starting to show color with bract coloration seen from early summer until freezing temperatures kill the leaves. The colorful bracts and flowers will attract butterflies, and leaves will provide food source for some sphinx moth caterpillars.

See Texas or Wild Poinsettias in our Hummingbird Garden and natural areas accessible from our nature trails.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of June 13, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

ALMOND VERBENA (*Alloysia virgata*)

Almond Verbena is definitely a delight to the nose in any garden as its sweet almond fragrance permeates the area when flowering. Named 2008 *Florida Plant of the Year*, it also is a butterfly magnet providing excellent nectar source with hundreds of tiny flowers during flowering periods.

Tiny white flowers on 4-6 inch flower stalks can be found all over this plant when in bloom for 2-3 week bloom cycles multiple times each year, often around rainy periods. Almond verbena is a large shrub reaching 15 feet high, able to be trimmed into a hedge or a small multi-trunk tree. USDA classifies it a Zone 8 plant surviving to 20 degrees for extended periods, thus found in butterfly gardens throughout Central Texas. In cooler areas, it is deciduous, dropping leaves in winter, but here it keeps leaves year-round unless a hard freeze. Besides the flowers tempting your olfactory senses, the sandy-textured, 3-4 inch simple pinnate leaves delight your fingertips as well.

Almond Verbena is a woody member of the Verbena (*Verbenaceae*) Family, closely related to our native “Whitebrush” or “Texas Beebush” (*Aloysia gratissima*).

See Almond Verbena as a hedge in the Sensory Garden, but is more prominent in the Butterfly Garden approaching the Orchid Conservatory bridge.



VIOLET RUELLIA (*Ruellia nudicaulis*)

Violet Ruellia is a low-growing late season wildflower in the deep south from Alabama to Arizona, and Texas down into Mexico and Central America, found on the edge of wooded areas and adjacent open grassy spaces. Individual 1-2 inch light violet flowers appear on stalks above gray-green oval leaves 1 inch wide, 2 inches long. Although commonly called “Wild Violet Petunia,” Ruellia is in the Acanthus (*Acanthaceae*) Family, not the Nightshade (*Solanaceae*) Family like the traditional cultivated petunia.

Violet petunia can reach 12-18 inches in shaded areas if not manicured. However, in areas with regular mowing, the stems remain near ground level and flower stalks are only 6-8 inches tall. Usual flowering is April through October.

This ruellia will reseed, but unlike its taller cousin, Mexican Petunia (*Ruellia brittoniana*), it does not have thick stems or form dense clumps. Instead its smaller thin stems easily can be mowed. It is an important larval plant for many butterflies including Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*), White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*), Cuban Crescent (*Anthanassa frisia*) and Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*), the flowers providing a nectar source, as well. It also may have medicinal uses since the Spanish name is *Hierba de la Calentura*, or “herb of the fever”.

See this Ruellia in grassy areas behind the Sensory Garden, on Butterfly Hill, along grassy areas of nature trails, near the Earthkind Demonstration Garden and Arid Garden.



BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of June 6, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

EARLY SUNRISE COREOPSIS (*Coreopsis grandiflora* Early Sunrise)

Early Sunrise, aka *Early Sunrise Tickseed*, is a wide-leaf perennial coreopsis cultivar, a 1989 *All-American Selections Award Winner*, popular in gardens throughout much of the country ever since. It was developed from wild *Coreopsis grandiflora* wildflowers native to southeastern United States, naturally occurring through Eastern Texas. But the native form is taller, not as floriferous as the Early Sunrise cultivar.

Much showier than the local native needle-leaf varieties with small golden flowers and dark centers that commonly grow in wet areas, Early Sunrise has broad, glossy green leaves forming a cluster at the base of the plant. Bright golden yellow semi-double blossoms about 2 inches wide with yellow centers stand 12-20 inches tall, towering above the lush greenery. Plants bloom from April through much of fall if kept watered, fertilized and dead-headed.

Early Sunrise Tickseed, a good butterfly nectar plant, is more commonly found in garden centers than true native forms due to its compact growth habit and showy flowers. Find it either in bedding plant section for smaller pots, or gallon pots among other butterfly attracting perennials. Easy to grow, thriving in full sun but needing well-drained soils, once established it is a water-wise perennial.

See it in the Sensory Garden around “Windmill Artscape.”



HEARTLEAF SKULLCAP (*Scutellaria ovata*)

Despite the common name, Heartleaf Skullcap, a member of the mint family (*Lamiaceae*) does not have a traditional heart-shaped leaf. Instead, the fuzzy blue-gray leaves with serrated edges are more oval as the species name ‘*ovata*’ indicates. The velvety leaves provide not just a color contrast to green gardens, but also an added sensory factor.

Although native to Texas, its indigenous range stretches beyond our borders from Mexico to Minnesota and east to Florida.

It is a low-growing, spreading perennial, with plants typically growing 6-10 inches tall creating a groundcover for flowerbeds or butterfly gardens. Flower stalks featuring individual tiny blue blossoms with white throats less than .5 inches wide, emerge above the velvety foliage, similarly to its salvia cousins. Plants typically bloom from April through mid-summer. Super easy to grow, it can be separated and moved to other areas of the garden once established.



See Heartleaf Skullcap, a perennial butterfly nectar plant, in the Butterfly Garden across from the Butterfly House entrance.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of May 30, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

GEORGE BURNS FLORIBUNDA ROSE (*Rosa hybrida* 'George Burns')

'George Burns' definitely is a colorful character among rose varieties, always bringing a smile to your face, as did the late comic. Multicolored blossoms come in a variety of color mixtures as flowers vary with variegated, multicolored petals featuring confetti-like combinations of red, yellow, rose pink and cream. More yellow tones like cooler temperatures, explaining the mostly red/pink tones currently seen.

Developed by Tom Carruth at Weeks Roses by crossing 'Calico' with 'Roller Coaster', 'George Burns' was released in 1998, becoming an instant favorite. This floribunda typically grows 3 feet tall with dark green foliage and compact growth habit. Like other floribunda roses, 'George Burns' blossoms, 3.5-4 inches across, are slightly smaller than most Hybrid Tea roses, but produce more blossoms, often in clusters. *George Burns also is a fragrant rose, appealing to eye and nose, definitely making a lasting impression on your senses!*



Enjoy 'George Burns' and other colorful friends in the Rose Garden during peak blooming season, April through early June!

MEXICAN FEATHERGRASS (*Nassella tenuissima*)

'Mexican Feather Grass' is a low-growing, clumping ornamental grass native to dry, well-drained soils of West Texas and New Mexico. A member of the Grass Family (*Poaceae*), it has become a popular ornamental due to its delicate texture and smaller size compared to many other clumping landscape grasses. It makes a nice contrast for a cactus/succulent planting with similar water needs. In fact, if planted in the landscape, good drainage is a necessity, as it quickly rots if kept too moist.

Clumps grow only 18-24 inches tall. Besides the thin pale green leaves which flow in the wind like fine hair, it currently has beige seed heads which look like an extension of the grass blades. Other common names include *Mexican Wiregrass*, *Finestem Needlegrass*, *Ponytail Grass* and *Texas Tussock*.



See Mexican Feathergrass in the Sensory Garden.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of May 23, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

PLUMERIA 'AFRIQUE' and 'JUBILEE'

Plumeria always are favorite flowers for semi-tropical areas. Unfortunately, the February, 2021, deep freeze took a toll on many of our mature tropical favorites. Thankfully, much of the Botanical Gardens' plumeria collection has been replaced by exhibit curators, the Plumeria Society of South Texas, with smaller plants being shipped in from Hawaii and Florida.



While we don't have large plumeria this year, some of the new varieties already are blooming! One of the first to blossom this year is yellow and white *Afrique*. *Afrique* makes a large, stunning display which should bloom for weeks due to sheer number of flower buds. A bright pink form, *Jubilee*, also is in full bloom! Both plants are under 2 feet tall, allowing you to admire the blossoms even more this year as they begin their growth to the tall stature of our previous collection.

The Plumeria Garden "grove" will have more blooming varieties as summer progresses, thanks to the Plumeria Society. Plants are removed from the ground and stored bare-root in greenhouses starting November 1, through early March. The Willoughby Viewing Platform is an excellent summer "micro-wedding" spot, surrounded by flowers.

GREGG'S MISTFLOWER (*Conoclinium Greggii*)

Gregg's Mistflower, a central and west Texas native, is a low-growing groundcover form of *Conoclinium*, with clusters of tiny light blue flowers. Its common name comes from the blue misty appearance of masses of thin-petal blossom clusters which in mass appear as a blue mist.

Gregg's Mistflower only grows 12-16" tall making a nice groundcover with delicate-looking three-pointed bright green serrated-edge leaves. This mistflower is deciduous, dropping leaves and dying back to the ground each winter. But don't dig it up or replant with something else! Roots and underground stems only are dormant, and this perennial will reemerge in spring with lots of flowers if left alone during winter.



Gregg's Mistflower is in the aster family (*Asteraceae*). Naturally growing in dry, calcareous soils from Central Texas through New Mexico and Arizona, it is well-adapted in much of Texas including the Coastal Bend if it gets good drainage. Locally, two native forms of mistflower in the same family can be found here including Padre Island Mistflower (*Conoclinium betonicifolium*) and Fall Mistflower (*Chromolaena odorata* formerly *Eupatorium odorata*). It was named after botanist Josiah Gregg (1806-1855) who documented many plants of North Central and East Texas during two expeditions in 1840-41, later writing "The Commerce of the Prairies" in 1844, describing many native American plants.

See Gregg's Mistflower in the Butterfly Garden and on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden. You likely will see multiple monarch and queen butterflies nectaring on this plant, bringing lots of fluttering life to the Garden as a butterfly magnet, especially during Fall migration season, also serving as deer browse in Central Texas.

BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of May 16, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

VITEX or CHASTE TREE (*Vitex agnus-castus*)

While many think Vitex is a Texas native, it actually is from the Mediterranean region of South Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Early writings show its introduction to the U.S. as early as the 1670s, having come via early settlers from English gardens. Vitex does well in our region despite the heat and has been awarded the Texas Superstar designation by Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service. Despite its woody stems, Vitex is a member of the mint family (*Lamiaceae*) along with many herbs and coleus.

Starting in late April, Vitex will produce its best show of purple flower spikes for 6-8 weeks. Lesser blooming may extend throughout summer and fall. Light pruning removing dead blooms can result in new flowering. Vitex also has pale pink and white varieties, not as common as the purple form.

The fragrant compound palmate leaf looks like green fingers, giving a lavender aroma when brushed against, some calling it *Texas Lavender Tree*. A bit messy with spent flowers falling during its bloom cycle, it also produces seedlings after pollination by hummingbirds, butterflies or bees.

Vitex will form a small tree reaching 12-18 feet, but also can be severely pruned near the ground annually to form a 6-8 foot bush. Tree forms require regular pruning to remove frequent suckering from the base.

See Vitex Gardens blooming in the Butterfly Garden, and Tree Demonstration Garden near outdoor tortoise pens.



ENGLEMANN'S DAISY (*Englemannia peristenia*)

Englemann's Daisy—native to West Texas and Hill Country, as well as Arizona, up into Kansas and Missouri—grows to 18-24 inches high with multiple branches emerging from the central crown. Pale yellow daisy flowers about 1.5 inches across fully open late afternoon, with slightly curled petals earlier in the day. Pale green leaves with serrated edges gives it the alternate common name of "*Cutleaf Daisy*."

It may die back in cold winter months, coming back each year. It prefers dry clay and calcareous soils, often found blooming in late spring and early summer along roadsides even in drought conditions due to its prominent taproot.

Although in the aster/daisy family *Asteraceae*, it is a "monotypic genus," meaning there is only one species in the genus *Englemannia*. It was named after German-born botanist George Englemann who immigrated, settling in St. Louis, becoming a leader in plant identification throughout the Central U.S. in the 1800s.

See Englemann's Daisy on Butterfly Hill, a monarch waystation planting behind the Sensory Garden, adjacent to the Butterfly Garden.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of May 9, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

VANILLA ORCHID (*Vanilla aphylla*)

Vanilla aphylla, the common Vanilla Orchid, is best known for its seed pods, the vanilla bean! Many don't realize this is where we obtain the sweet taste and fragrance for ice cream and other delicious desserts. It is native to southeast Asia and Malaysia.

The Vanilla Orchid plant is among the largest in the orchid family (*Orchidaceae*), forming a thick-stemmed vine which climbs up tree trunks and other objects for support, attached by roots emerging from the stem, similar to those seen on Pothos Ivy. Specimens found in the Samuel Jones Orchid Greenhouse are easily 18-20 feet long, growing up multiple walls in our conservatory. With age and proper support in cultivation, the plant is more likely to flower.

Vanilla beans occur only after pollination, with the anther and pistil covered by petals deep in the flower. Without the natural pollinators in our greenhouse, pollination will require use of a toothpick to expose the hidden pistil and anthers, a process we have not attempted, to allow the flowers themselves to be enjoyed by more guests.

Currently the Vanilla Orchid surrounding the main Orchid Conservatory entrance has a cluster of blossoms, opening individually. The flowers are approximately 4 inches wide with cream-colored petals in a greenish hue, and light butter-yellow lip, lasting only a couple of days.



AUGUSTA DUELBERG MEALY SAGE (*Salvia farinacea* 'Augusta Duelberg')

Mealy Sage, native to Central and West Texas and New Mexico, has spread its distribution to California, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Florida and even Ohio! Well-adapted to a wide range of soils, it can be found in prairie, meadows, roadsides, edges of forests and even dry West Texas calcareous soils.

Typically growing 12-24 inches, it reseeds producing multiple plants creating a mound that blooms short spikes of medium to light blue flowers, with variations all the way to white. Usually, 1 to 3 tubular flowers open at a time on each flower spike providing blossoms from spring until frost. If flowering slows, removing spent flower spikes will encourage more blossoms.

While the native form is shorter, vigorous growing selections have been made. The most familiar may be the blue *Henry Duelberg* reportedly collected from a cemetery by noted Texas plantsman Greg Grant, and named a Texas Superstar by Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service.

However, a white sport also was propagated off *Henry Duelberg*, named after his wife Augusta. Both of the Duelberg sages bloom throughout late spring through fall, and are good nectar sources for butterflies, hummingbirds and bees.

Augusta Duelberg Mealy Sage can be found in full bloom in the Butterfly and Earthkind Gardens along with its partner, the classic blue 'Henry Duelberg' Mealy Sage.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of May 2, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

'CINCO DE MAYO' FLORIBUNDA ROSE (*Rosa hybrida* 'Cinco de Mayo')

'Cinco de Mayo' is a prolific flowering floribunda rose, with flowers described as a "blending of smoked lavender and rusty red-orange." Blooms open fully to 3.5 inches wide, 20-25 petals each, and 3-5 blossoms on each stem. This floribunda grows to 3-4 feet tall with glossy green foliage and rounded, bushy growth habit.

Cinco de Mayo was introduced by Weeks Roses in 2009, a hybrid between red/white *Topsy Turvy* and bright yellow *Julia Child* floribundas. It was a 2009 All-American Rose Selection (AARS) Winner, an award bestowed annually upon roses outperforming all others in American gardens and vases.

"Cinco de Mayo" (Fifth of May) is an annual celebration of the 1862 victory of the Mexican army over France, at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War, making it fitting to feature this rose as many South Texans prepare for the holiday this week! March-May is prime bloom season for South Texas roses, with fewer blossoms present during summer heat.



See two groupings of 'Cinco de Mayo' in raised beds in the Rose Garden.

SEASIDE HELIOTROPE (*Heliotropium curassavicum*)

Seaside Heliotrope is a low-growing perennial wildflower native to much of the Americas from Canada to Argentina. Its wide distribution yields a plethora of regional common names like *salt heliotrope*, *monkey tail*, *quail plant*, and *Chinese parsley*. Spanish names include *cola de mico* or *cola de dama*.

It grows in salty soils with many geographical variants. While our plants typically grow 6-12 inches tall, other variations can be taller. Stems and gray-green foliage are thick and fleshy. Multiple tiny white blossoms form an elongated inflorescence that blooms from the base to the end with several flowers open at any given time over several weeks. Each individual flower has five white rounded petals.



See Seaside Heliotrope along the edge of the low areas on the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail bordering wetlands.

GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of April 25, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

COCONUT ORCHID (*Maxillariella tenuifolia*)

Maxillaria tenuifolia is called the **Coconut Orchid** due to a distinct coconut scent of the maroon petals, and white with maroon-spotted lip blossoms less than an inch across. Each flower spike typically has 10-12 blossoms, with a plant easily having 50-60 blooms each cycle. The grass-like foliage stays fairly compact, and is a good potted plant even not in bloom. It does need good drainage with orchid bark or similar medium to prevent rotting.

This species was discovered near Veracruz, Mexico, by Karl Theodore Hartweg and described by Lindley in 1837 in the *Botanical Register*. It naturally grows from Mexico to Costa Rica at elevations up to 5000 feet.

See (and smell) Coconut Orchid in the rear section of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



LAZY DAISY (*Aphanostephus riddellii*)

Lazy Daisy, a member of the Aster or Sunflower Family (*Asteraceae*), is a low-growing Texas native wildflower found in abundance throughout much of the Coastal Bend in well-drained sandy and loam soils, and in prairies from the Texas Panhandle down to Corpus Christi.

Small individual white daisy flowers, with narrow white petals and bright yellow centers, are found in clusters. Flowers often do not open until afternoon, thus the “lazy” moniker. A good nectar source for butterflies, blooming from March-June, these perennials come back year after year, hugging the ground typically 5-8 inches tall. It also is called *Riddel’s Lozedaisy* in some guides.

See the largest patch in our Arid Garden, or also sporadically in the field between the playground and Arid Garden, and on Oso Ridge on the far side of our boardwalk.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of April 18, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

ARCTIC BLUE FLORIBUNDA ROSE (*Rosa hybrida* 'Arctic Blue')

'Arctic Blue' is an exceptionally drought tolerant floribunda rose, grows to 3-4 feet tall with medium green foliage, producing fully double, lilac pink blooms with a creamy white reverse. Flowers open fully to a width of 3-4 inches per bloom, with multiple buds often open at once on a branch. Blossoms, which have a moderate citrus fragrance, also hold up well in the heat. Floribunda rose Arctic Blue is relatively new on the market, hybridized by Christian Bedard, released in 2017.



See a grouping of 'Arctic Blue' floribunda roses in the center raised bed on the south side of the Rose Pavilion. March through May is prime bloom season for roses in South Texas, with fewer blossoms present during the heat of summer.

TEXAS DANDELION (*Pyrrhopappus pauciflorus*)

Also known as *Small Flower Desert Chicory* and *False Dandelion*, Texas Dandelion is a member of the Aster (*Asteraceae*) Family along with daisies, sunflowers, and mist flowers; and are native to southern states from Arizona to Florida.

Plants hug the ground and are a broadleaf "weed" in cultivated turf areas. In spring, flower stalks stand 6-8 inches tall providing a blanket of three-fourths-inch pale yellow flowers each morning, closing by late afternoon. After pollination, the traditional soft, fuzzy dandelion seed head appears, allowing for wind distribution and fun for kids of all ages as they make wishes and blow away the seeds!

"Foraging Texas" notes Dandelion leaves, roots and flowers are edible, with young leaves usable in salad or boiled; flowers sometimes used in dandelion wine; and roots roasted to for a coffee substitute! Dandelions are rich in Vitamins A, B, thiamine, riboflavin along with minerals and protein. Medicinally, the flower is used as wound healer in a salve or infused oil. Roots and leaves uses include diuretic, antibacterial, laxative, sedative and appetite stimulant.

See Texas Dandelion in less formal grass areas and fields near the EarthKind Garden and between Monkey Mansion playground and the Arid Garden.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of April 11, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

LAELIA 'NEMESIS' ORCHID (*Laelia* X '*Nemesis*')

Laelia 'Nemesis' Orchid is a hybrid of two Mexican species, *Laelia superbiens* and *Laelia anceps*. This combination produced a showy, vigorously-growing, head-turning hybrid with clusters of pink lavender-tinged flowers, magenta-purple lips, and bright yellow throats on 18-24 inch stalks standing well above the leaves. Bright, indirect light yields an impressive specimen in a relatively short time frame. Growers also note it is more tolerant of temperature extremes than many other orchid species--a good option to grow outdoors much of the year, with protection from wind and direct sun.

See *Laelia* 'Nemesis' Orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



ANACONCHO ORCHID TREE (*Bauhinia lunaroides* - formerly *B. congesta*)

Anacondo Orchid Tree, or *Chihuahua Orchid Tree*, is a West-Central Texas native shrub ranging into northern Mexico. It's a compact grower with considerably smaller flowers than its cousins the *Hong Kong Orchid Tree* (*B. purpurea*), or the South Texas native *Mexican Orchid Tree* (*B. mexicana*). Identified as a Zone 8 plant, root hardy to 10-20°F, it also is more freeze tolerant than its cousins. It surprisingly is a member of the Pea (*Fabaceae*) Family, more evident after producing seed pods post-pollination!

Although it can be trimmed into a small ornamental tree, it naturally produces multiple trunks creating a shrub 6-12 feet tall and 6-10 feet wide. Clusters of white or pink flowers bloom 2 or 3 times a year for a month each. Leaves are round, double-lobed, or cloven-hoof shape, but typically only 1-1.5 inches across. It grows well in alkaline soils but requires good drainage.

See two *Anacondo Orchid Trees* currently blooming in the Butterfly Garden, providing nectar for butterflies!



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of April 4, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

NEARLY WILD ROSE (*Rosa* X 'Nearly Wild')

'Nearly Wild' is a floribunda hybrid cross, 'Dr. W. Van Fleet' x 'Leuchstern', in the Rose (*Rosaceae*) Family. Growing 2-3 feet tall in dense shrubby for, single-form flowers with bright pink 5-petaled blossoms are approximately 3 inches across with lighter centers and yellow stamen. The simple flower form where it gets its name reminds us of apple blossoms, also in the Rose Family. 'Nearly Wild' blooms much of the year with multiple blossoms producing a burst of color even in summer when many other roses are bloomless.

See 'Nearly Wild' in raised beds in the Rose Garden.



ROSE VERVAIN, ROSE MOCK VERVAIN, SWEET WILLIAM

(*Glandularia canadensis*)

Rose Vervain is a low-growing native wildflower found in abundance throughout much of the Coastal Bend in both sandy and clay soils. It also is present in many central U.S. prairies from Illinois to Texas, eastward in most southern states from Florida through states north to Pennsylvania and Ohio. Part of the Verbenaceae Family (*Verbenaceae*), it is closely related to lantana, American Beautyberry, beebrush (*Aloysia*), along with prairie verbena and domesticated verbena varieties.

Clusters of slightly-fragrant light purple 5-petal blossoms bloom in early spring, flowering into summer months, one of the first wildflowers to bloom after this year's severe freeze. Its low growth pattern provides a backdrop for taller spring wildflowers. Each petal has a double-lipped terminal edge like the top of a heart. Closer looks at blooms reveal a tubular flower, a nectar source for butterflies and hummingbirds.

Plants hug the ground typically 5-10 inches tall with hairy, highly toothed leaves. It is an annual in northern areas, but may "perennialize" in mild winter areas such as South Texas, with plants living multiple years.

See Rose Vervain mixed in native grasses at Earthkind Gardens; from play area to Arid Garden; on the Oso Ridge on the far side of the wetland boardwalk; in patches along the Brennecke Nature Trail; and close to the large wetland area behind the Arid Garden.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of March 28, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

ORANGE ZEST CESTRUM (*Cestrum aurantiacum* 'Orange Zest')

Orange Zest Cestrum, also called *Orange Zest Jessamine*, is a large, semi-deciduous shrub found in gardens throughout the South up to USDA Zone 8. Known for its fast growth up to 6 feet tall, with full, rounded shrubby appearance, it spreads 4-5 feet wide without encroaching on other plants. Tolerant of a wide range of soils including South Texas' common alkaline clay soils, Orange Zest does need organic matter added for good drainage.

Clusters of tubular golden flowers with an orange tint are great hummer and butterfly nectar sources. Flowers, which provide a faint orange citrus fragrance on still evenings, are 1.5-2 inches long, but only a fourth to half-inch wide at the top. Simple bright green leaves 2-3 inches wide and 4-5 inches long add a lush feel to landscape. Plants in Zone 9 typically keep leaves in winter, but become deciduous further north into Zone 8, near I-20 Corridor.

Cestrum is native to Guatemala and the Caribbean. They are members of the night-shade (*Solanaceae*) family, making them surprising cousins of tomatoes, peppers and potatoes despite differing appearance.

See Orange Zest Cestrum in the Butterfly House; and sheared specimens in the Hummingbird Garden recovering from the recent freeze.



PINK EVENING PRIMROSE (*Oenothera speciosa*)

Pink Evening Primrose is a low-growing native wildflower found abundantly in much of Texas. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center reports it originally native to grasslands from Northern Mexico up through Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Nebraska.

Its multiple common names include *pink ladies*, *showy evening primrose*, *Mexican primrose*, *amapola*, and even *buttercups* due to their yellow centers. Despite the common name, southern populations of this flower open in the morning and close at night! Conversely, plants in northern regions open in evening and close in the morning, creating a lot of confusion around a good common name.

Individual 4-petal light pink flowers are 1.5 inches across, creating a cup-like appearance with distinctive pink veins, white centers, and yellow stamen in the center. Colors range from darker pink to white. Each flower lasts 1 day, but the plant blooms consistently February through July. The foliage portion has a low-growing, sprawling form 12-24 inches across. Its simple leaves can be used as salad greens, with best flavor from young plants before flowering.

Seed capsules attract birds, especially finches, as well as some small mammals.

See Primrose along native grassy areas by the Earthkind Gardens; from playground to Arid Garden; and on the Oso Ridge on the far side of the wetlands boardwalk.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of March 21, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

CRYSTAL PALACE LOBELIA (*Lobelia erinus*)

Lobelia, a cool-season annual, typically seen in Coastal Bend landscapes November through May, is more common in northern U.S. and Canada where it grows throughout summer. Delicate dark green leaves have a burgundy tint. Stalks of tiny brilliant blue flowers emerge above, blooming for months without removing old blossoms. Lobelia grows to 6 inches tall, spreading to 12 inches wide, making it a good short-term groundcover. As temperatures rise, this plant starts to thin, but more heat-tolerant varieties are being developed in the “Proven Winners” program.

Lobelia is in the Bellflower (Campanulaceae) Family. The leaves, stems and flowers are reportedly used medicinally, with some herbal remedies claiming benefits against asthma, bronchitis, whooping cough, and smoking cessation; but without sufficient scientific evidence to support these claims. NOTE: Lobelia may be unsafe if ingested, so do not grow it for home remedy use.

See Lobelia in multiple flower beds between the Visitor Center and Orchid House, and near the Tropical Garden, as well as a supplemental planting in pots with larger tropical plants.



MEXICAN PLUM (*Prunus Mexicana*)

Mexican Plum is a medium-sized tree native to Texas, Mexico, and up through the Missouri-Kansas Border, along forest prairie borders. Reported growing in some areas up to 35 feet, taller than most cultivated plums, its common name is *Big Tree Plum*! But in much of Texas, it matures closer to 20 feet tall, due to extended drought and windy conditions.

In early spring before many trees bud out, Mexican Plum reveals clusters of tiny white flowers about a half- inch across. Important to pollinators in early spring before other plants bloom, if flowers are pollinated, the resulting fruit begin to mature in July as round purplish ‘drupes’ (plums). Fruit are typically smaller than cultivated plums giving it another common name of *Inch Plum* in other regions. It is a single-trunked tree, growing individually instead of in groups like many native plants, its natural growth habit making it a desirable rootstock for many grafted plums.

Plums are related to other fruit trees including apples, pear, peach and almond. However, few people know they are in the Rose Family (*Rosaceae*), which not only connects them to roses, but also Indian Hawthorn, Photinia and Pyracantha.

See a young Mexican Plum, in full bloom for the next week or so. behind the Butterfly Garden.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of March 14, 2021)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently offers limited classes, and no weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, per our COVID-19 protocol, health and safety of guests. Fulfilling its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

DENDROBIUM AGGREGATUM Orchid

Dendrobium aggregatum, also known as *D. lindleyi* in some orchid circles, is a spring-flowering species offering a bright burst of bold yellow among more common white and purple orchid flowers. From Southeast Asia, including mountainous areas of Thailand, China, and India, unlike many tall-growing Dendrobiums, this species has compact growth with wide, dark green leaves about 3 inches wide and 6 inches long, hugging the pot. The flower spikes however, soar from the rosette of leaves with showers of golden round blossoms about a half-inch across, often cascading past the pot, making hanging plants the best display option. Spikes may be 12-18 inches long, with 50 or more individual blossoms each.

These orchids like bright indirect light, good air circulation and high humidity, conditions naturally achieved in our area by pots placed under trees much of the year.

See large specimens of this stunning orchid in bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



TEXAS BABY BLUE EYES (*Nemophila phacelioides*)

Commonly called *Baby Blue Eyes*, less commonly *Flannel Breeches*, this early spring wildflower is one of the first to emerge after our heavy freeze. A member of the Waterleaf Family (*Hydrophyllaceae*), a subfamily of the Borages, with many of the 20 related species identified as natural astringents, it typically blooms late February through April, dying off by June.

Its .75 inch blue-violet flowers with white centers give *Baby Blue Eyes* their common name. Plants grow 4-6 inches tall with gray-green, rounded hairy leaves. Making a striking show early in the season, they soon are accompanied by other wildflowers, and lost from view due to short stature. Growing in a variety of soils including clay, sand, loams, and caliche, plants are ecologically important providing early sources of nectar and pollen for butterflies, moths, and bees.

See the most prominent *Baby Blue Eyes* in the Arid Garden, but also in grassy fields, between Sensory and Arid Gardens.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of March 7, 2021)

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VERBENA FIREHOUSE MIX (*Verbena canadiensis*)

Firehouse™ Verbena series, developed by Ball Seed Co. as an annual verbena for use in flowerbeds, pots and hanging baskets, typically grows 10 inches tall, spreading to nearly 2 feet! It is powdery mildew-resistant, and more heat tolerant than other annual verbenas.

Firehouse™ series comes in red, pink, white, purple and blended combinations, with tubular blossoms, creating mounds of flowers approximately 3 inches across for strong visual impact.

Butterflies and bees nectar off verbena flowers, particularly important in early spring when other plants are dormant, or not blooming after freezing weather.

See hanging baskets of Firehouse™ Verbena located in our Butterfly House!



HENBIT (*Lamium amplexicaule*)

Commonly called *Henbit* or *Henbit Deadnettle*, this native wildflower often is considered a weed in lawns and flowerbeds, but is one of the first wildflowers blooming again post-freeze! This year, it is important to preserve as many of these early spring “weeds” as possible for butterfly and bee nectar sources while cultivated gardens are bare.

In the mint family, *Lamiaceae*, along with salvias, coleus and many common herbs, the tubular pink/lavender blossoms with white throats and purple spots on the petals emerge from circles of leaves near the stem tip. More rounded green leaves grow in whorls every few inches along the stem. Plants typically stand 6-12 inches tall, with stems growing longer, laying down on the ground, reaching 2 feet or more, if allowed.

Henbit is distributed in much of North America, especially along the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coastal areas, plus in Europe. Although treated as a noxious weed in many areas, herbalists say it has astringent, diuretic, diaphoretic, purgative, with anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties.

See Henbit in grassy areas between the Sensory Garden and Monkey Mansion, and sporadically along the Brennecke Nature Trail and other grassy fields.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Feb. 28, 2021)

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CATTLIANTHE x 'GOLD DIGGER'

Cattlianthe 'Gold Digger' is an orchid hybrid originated by Mr. and Mrs. W. O'Dell, in 1974; and is a cross of Ctt. 'Red Gold' and Ctt. 'Warpaint'. It is recognized by clusters of 4 to 8 medium-sized golden blossoms, about two inches across, with a maroon speckled throat.

It's a striking contrast to multiple purple and lavender orchid blooms in many collections. Coming soon are many Phalaenopsis and Dendrobium now in full spike and bud.

See potted specimens of this beautiful orchid and several others blooming now in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



JUMPING CACTUS (*Cylindropuntia leptocaulis*), formerly (*Opuntia leptocaulis*)

We are featuring Jumping Cactus because it appears untouched after our 18°F freeze last week! A true cactus in the family *Cactaceae*, it naturally is found in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona and adjacent Mexico. Its other common names include *tasajillo*, *desert Christmas cactus* and *Christmas cholla*.

Plants typically grow 2-5 feet tall with narrow, pencil-shaped segmented stems that quickly detach, allowing them to propagate, spread and establish new plants. Stems begin dark green, but turn lighter green or tan with age. Insignificant yellow/green flowers appear April through summer, forming small red fruit if pollinated. New growth has small succulent tree leaves that look like small thick triangles near the stem, all of which fall off in early spring.

Jumping Cactus has two sizes of spines (often misidentified as thorns). The longer spines are .5-1.5 inches long, surrounded by smaller hairline-spines about .3 inches long. The spines allow stem segments to attach or "jump" onto animal fur and clothing for distribution and "travel" to other areas.

See Jumping Cactus in several locations along the Brenneke Nature Trail with several specimens on the incline approaching the Freshwater Wetland Nursery Bridge, and Bird Tower.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Feb. 14, 2021)

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PAPHIOPEDILUM HYBRID ORCHID 'JERRY SPENCE'

Hybrid Paphiopedilum X 'Jerry Spence' is known for its yellow and ivory petals with maroon stripes, speckled petals and a purple slipper pouch. It was originally bred by F. Booth in 1989, as a cross between Path. Rothschildianum X Paph. Berenice.

Paphiopedilum orchids, commonly called *lady slipper orchids*, have the unique pouch on the tongue petal with flowers soaring on a stalk above the vegetative plant. Dark green, often speckled strap-like leaves provide more attractive foliage than many other orchid genera.

Native to South East Asia, they are more terrestrial than many other orchid genera, so tend to prefer more moisture. They are low-light orchids which the American Orchid Society considers well-adapted as a houseplant, and may be treated similarly to African Violets.



See multiple Paphiopedilum varieties now in bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.

BLACKBRUSH ACACIA (*Vachellia rigidula*)

Blackbrush Acacia, a large shrub/small tree--also known as Blackbrush, Chaparro Prieto, and Gavia--is a member of the Fabaceae (Pea/Bean) family along with other native cousins mesquite, ebony, and retama. Found in South Texas thorn scrub chaparral, from Rio Grande Plains to Austin, stretching from Corpus Christi west to Big Bend, hugging the Mexican Border, it formerly was classified in genus *Acacia* with scientific names *Acacia amentacea* and *Acacia rigidula* in older literature.

It is quite drought tolerant and a good Xeriscape shrub, easily incorporated into arid landscapes and rock gardens. Known for its spiny stiff branches forming dense thicket growing 4-12 feet tall, it is one of the first plants to bloom in spring in the thornscrub with numerous spikes of pale yellow frilly flowers 1-2 inches long, often appearing on bare branches, preceding spring leaf flush.

The pale bark has a white/gray color contrasting with small dark green compound leaves. Flowers are used by bees as a pollen source and nectar source for butterflies, and granivorous birds feed on seeds after they drop. If pollinated, small brown beans form later in spring.



See Blackbrush Acacia along the Brennecke Nature Trail, with greatest population near the Palapa Grande, and behind the Arid Garden.

GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Feb. 7, 2021)

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SHRIMP PLANT (*Justicia brandegeana*)

Shrimp plant is a member of the Acanthus Family (*Acanthaceae*), a large group including favorites like firecracker plant (*Russellia equisetiformis*), flame acanthus (*Ansiscanthus wrightii*), and Mexican petunias (*Ruellia* sp.).

A tropical herbaceous perennial native to Mexico, Shrimp Plant commonly grows 24-30 inches tall and 3 feet wide. It blooms year-round, providing nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies, notably in South Texas winters when few plants bloom. Reddish/maroon blossoms 3-4 inches long really are made up of bracts (modified leaves) which retain color longer to attract pollinators. The white 1–1.5 inch tubular blossom emergin like legs on a shrimp is the true flower! Each "shrimp" inflorescence may produce 20-30 white flowers in 1-2 months.

Branches are distinctively segmented at nodes where leaves are attached, with additional branches emerging at these points. Slightly fuzzy leaves covered with plant hairs usually are an inch wide and 1-2 inches long. Shrimp Plant needs periodic pruning to control size. Pruning in late spring or early summer, after other plants are in full bloom, is recommended. To attract hummers, avoid pruning within 4-5 weeks before the September/October major hummingbird migration.

See Shrimp Plant in the Sensory and Hummingbird Gardens, and Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden.



TEXAS SABAL PALM (*Sabal mexicana*)

Texas Sabal, a member of the Palm Family (*Arecaceae*), has several common names such as Mexican Sabal Palm, Texas or Mexican Palmetto, Rio Grande Palmetto, Victoria Palmetto, Palma de Micharos, and Apachite. The much smaller palmetto (*Sabal minor*) is the only other native species in Texas.

Texas Sabal Palms are similar to their Florida cousin, the cabbage palm, or Florida Sabal (*Sabal palmetto*); but has a larger trunk--commonly 18-30 inches in diameter--and larger fronds, different than common Mexican Fan Palms (*Washingtonia robusta*). Sabal palm fronds are blue-green instead of bright yellow-green. Also, a large Texas Sabal Palm frond can be 3 feet wide, with a slight downward arch helping them hold shape in strong wind. They also are more cold-tolerant than *Washingtonia* palms, surviving historic 1980s freezes!

The slow-growing Texas Sabal may not show any trunk for up to 10 years after sprouting from seed, making them more expensive in retail outlets. We often see 10-20foot trees, but mature Sabal Palms can reach 50 feet! Native stands of Texas Sabal Palms still are found from Rio Grande Valley through Central America; but historically, they grew naturally along rivers in the Coastal Bend, and as far north as San Antonio. The only remaining Texas native stand is at Brownsville Sabal Palm Audubon Sanctuary, which extends into Northern Mexico.

Three prominent Texas Sabals form a triangle in the Botanical Gardens parking lot; with a taller single tree near the Arid Garden--all rescued and transplanted from an older Corpus Christi neighborhood more than 20 years ago, with assistance of the Devary Durrill Foundation.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Jan. 24, 2021)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently offers limited classes, and no weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, due to COVID-19 protocol, plus health and safety of guests. Fulfilling its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or possibly enhance your landscape!

GOLDEN ANGEL TRUMPET (*Brugmansia* sp.)

Golden Angel Trumpet is a large-growing tropical reaching up to 8 feet in our region. Large elegant flowers, about 8 inches long and 6 inches across, form on branch tips and hang down appearing to be “trumpets from heaven,” thus its common name. (Their erect-flowering cousins in the genus *Datura*, sometimes are called “Devil Trumpets.”)

Angel Trumpet flowers appear 3-4 times annually, with plants often covered by hundreds of large blossoms, for 1-3 weeks. Flowers are intoxicatingly fragrant, especially in evening and early morning. While golden yellow is one of the most popular colors, *Brugmansia* varieties also are pink, peach, white, or white with purple highlights.

Its tropical nature makes Angel Trumpet susceptible to freezing temperatures, but established plants in coastal gardens usually grow back from the base. *Brugmansia* species are native to South America from Venezuela to Northern Chile, where they were used by shaman for their hallucinogenic properties. Angel Trumpets are part of the night-shade family, *Solanaceae*, along with tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and potatoes. Although beautiful, all parts of the plant are highly toxic if ingested.

See stunning Golden Angel Trumpet near the Visitors Center Resident Reptiles outdoor entrance.



PRAIRIE ASTER (*Aster subulatus*)

Prairie Aster, also called “Hierba Del Marrano,” is a native annual possibly overlooked in regularly-mowed lawns and fields. Its small daisy-like flowers are about three-fourths inch across, with pale lavender petals and yellow center, which butterflies like for nectar. In Coastal Prairies and Rio Grande Plains, Prairie Aster grows abundantly in swales, ditches and other poorly-drained areas. Cattle and white-tail deer commonly graze on its simple, narrow leaves, keeping it shorter in fields.

Without cutting, it can reach 3 feet tall. A deep tap root helps it survive regular mowing, through winter months, appearing to be only 3-5 inches. It also can live in natural lawns with flowers peeking out between mowings.

See Prairie Aster in mowed areas near the Earthkind Demonstration Garden, in grassy fields between the Arid and Sensory Gardens, and along nature trails.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Jan. 17, 2021)

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CALENDULAS, Variety: 'Bon Bon' (*Calendula officinalis*)

Calendula is the local common name for these attractive bright yellow and orange flowering plants, although other parts of the world use “pot marigold” or “English marigold”, even though calendulas are in a different genus than traditional marigolds (*Tagetes* sp.). Believed to originate in southern Europe spreading through central and northern Europe, they later were introduced in the Americas.

Calendulas are annuals, which can be planted from seed, but most commonly from transplants in South Texas’ cooler months, blooming from October through May, able to take light frosts. Most retail varieties grow 8-18 inches tall with medium-sized simple grey-green leaves. As with other flowers in the daisy/sunflower family (*Asteraceae*), what we see as a single blossom actually is a composite of hundreds of tiny single flowers in a tight cluster. Flowers are about 3 inches across.

Calendulas need deadheading of spent flowers for re-bloom. They provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds; pollen for bees in cooler months; and are a larval plant for several moth species. Calendula flowers are used medicinally for wounds, rashes, infection and inflammation in homeopathic circles, but support evidence is lacking according to *WebMD*. Flower petals also were used in dyes and cosmetics in Ancient Greece and Rome.

See Calendulas in the Butterfly Garden.



FALSE RAGWEED (*Parthenium hysterophorus*)

Common called “False Ragweed,” this small herbaceous plant is a common white wildflower seen throughout South Texas. Other common names include *Santa Maria*, *Feverfew* and *Cicutilla*. While many consider it a native due to wide distribution in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas Coastal Plains, some speculate it originated in Tropical Americas, steadily moving northward.

Deeply-lobed aromatic leaves, with larger leaves up to 8 inches long, form a rosette near the base. Fewer, thinner 1-3 inch leaves grow on flower stalks, which reach 1-3 feet. Tiny white flowers, about one-quarter inch wide, resemble tiny cauliflowers up close! Most home gardeners consider this wildflower a weed; however, False Ragweed is a butterfly nectar source, especially in winter when flowers are few.

See False Ragweed in natural grassy areas along pathway connecting Arid and Sensory Gardens, and along nature trails.



GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Jan. 10, 2021)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently cannot offer Saturday classes, weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, or Orchid-ology series, due to COVID-19 protocol, plus health and safety of guests. Fulfilling its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or possibly enhance your landscape!

POWDER PUFF (*Calliandra haematocephala*)

This exotic is a member of the Mimosa Family (*Mimosaceae*), with characteristic dainty, puffy flowers. Powder Puff's reddish-pink blooms begin as buds resembling raspberries, but expand to 2-4 inches across when open, like an old-fashioned ladies powder puff; and attract butterflies, hummingbirds and bees! Leaves are compound composed of multiple leaflets, each about 1.5 inches wide and 1.5-2 inches long. Leaflets close in the evening, reopening each morning.

A tropical shrub, native to Bolivia, it can reach 12-15 feet tall, spreading 6-8 feet wide untrimmed. Plants may be cut back annually remaining a large shrub, or pruned into a small tree. A much more compact Texas native cousin called "Fairy Duster" (*Calliandra conferta*), only reaches 3-5 feet. Powder Puff is tropical and can suffer some damage to branches in severe freezes, or loss of leaves in a light freeze.

See Powder Puff on outer edge of the Hummingbird Garden, also visible from the edge of the adjacent Brennecke Nature Trail.



SNAKE EYES or "DEVIL QUEEN" (*Phaulothamnus spinescens*)

Snake Eyes, in other regions sometimes called Devil Queen, is a large shrub, 6-12 feet tall, small leaves, with no apparent thorns but sharp, pointed tips on branches providing protection from browsing animals.

Snake Eyes are *dioecious* (having male and female plants) with the female plants producing the translucent white berries which make the large, single black seed inside visible, resembling a small eyeball! A female plant may have hundreds of individual berries scattered on branches, producing several times a year. (The male plant simply produces leaves.)

This member of the Pokeweed Family (*Phytolaccaceae*) is kin to American Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) and Pigeonberry (*Rivina humilis*); and native to South Texas and Northern Mexico, from the Gulf of Mexico to Baja California including Mexican states Tamaulipas, Nueva Leon, and Sonora. Its Spanish name is *Ojo de Vibora*. Don't expect to find these at nurseries, as plants are rarely grown for retail sales.



"Keep an eye out" for several prominent Snake Eyes specimens on the Brennecke Nature Trail, near the Wetland Nursery Bridge, approaching the Bird Tower.

GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Jan. 3, 2021)

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CAPE ALOE (*Aloe ferox*)

This week's exotic is Cape Aloe, or Bitter Aloe, an impressive, tall Aloe form native to Southern Africa. In the wild, its thick fibrous stem allows it to grow 8-10 feet tall, more commonly topping out at 3-4 feet. The orange inflorescence (or flower stalk) is its identifying factor with compact tubular blossoms on a single stem reaching 2-3 feet. It has gray-green thick, fleshy leaves 4-5 inches wide, and 18-24 inches long, with reddish-brown spines on edges, and sometimes bottoms of leaves. It blooms during short days of winter, but is susceptible to freezes, which will kill flowers, and possibly damage leaves if temperatures drop into mid-20s.

Aloe ferox is used in cosmetics, and as a bitter tea with detoxing and laxative properties. It is a cousin to the smaller, well-known Burn Aloe (*Aloe vera*) and Soap Aloe (*A. maculata*), both used medicinally.

See Cape Aloe blooming in the Arid Garden, making an impressive statement in any succulent collection with sufficient room.



YELLOW ALDER or SUN DROP (*Turnera ulmifolia*)

Yellow Alder, or Sun Drop, is a short perennial shrub noted for its dark green foliage and abundance of contrasting bright yellow flowers. It sometimes is confused with another less common native cousin, Damatia (*Turnera diffusa*), with smaller more-cupped yellow flowers. Yellow Alder is part of the Passion Flower Family (*Passifloraceae*), native to Mexico and deep South Texas, as well as the West Indies.

Yellow Alder's bright yellow five-petal flowers are about 1.5 inches across, with blossoms present nearly year-round; but blooms in the morning, often closing by early afternoon. Plants grow 2-4 feet tall and about 3 feet in diameter. Leaves are 2-3 inches long and about 1 inch wide with distinct toothed edges. It is extremely easy to grow and drought tolerant once established. Be aware members of the genus will produce seeds, becoming a nuisance if left unmanaged; but can be kept in check with periodic weeding of unwanted seedlings.

See Yellow Alder in the Butterfly Garden, Butterfly Hill behind Sensory Garden, Hummingbird Garden and Earthkind Demonstration Garden.

