

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 are 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 speciose*)

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.

