

Gardens in Bloom

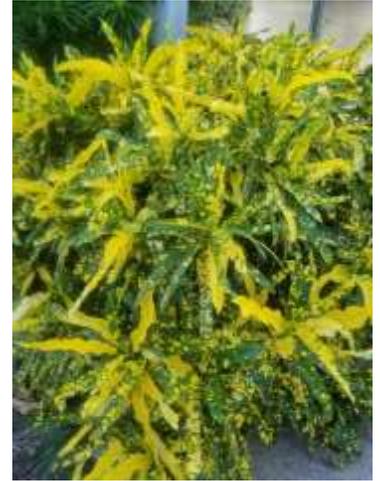
(week of Nov 15, 2020)

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 plant and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or enhance your landscape!

SLOPPY PAINTER CROTON (*Codiaeum variegatum* 'Sloppy Painter')

It's not the blooms which draw your eye to Sloppy Painter Croton (also known as Eleanor Roosevelt Croton), but the colorful, boldly-patterned leaves, having grown all summer, definitely get your attention! Crotons are tropical members of the euphorbia family (*Euphorbiaceae*) native to Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia and Western Pacific Islands. These woody shrubs come in a wide variety of leaf shapes and colors.

While mostly grown potted on patios, our mild winters allow crotons to be planted in the ground in protected areas. Sloppy Painter begins as a dense compact plant, but matures at 4-5 feet tall. Leaves start as simple, narrow, and about 4 inches long--but mature to inch-and-a-half wide, reaching 8 inches long, with rippled edges. When grown in sun, the yellow markings become more prominent, but they revert to nearly all green when in shade.



See pictured specimen at entrance of Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory. Other varieties are in our Tropical Garden, and in front of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.

GULF MUHLY GRASS (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)

This native grass is a showstopper when in fall bloom, lasting September into January depending on temperature and precipitation. The rest of the year, the clumping grass has narrow gray-green leaves 24-30 inches long. But a glorious show of delicate seed heads will emerge from the clump, producing 3-4 foot flower stalks by fall, creating a shimmering pink/lavender cloud dancing back and forth in the wind!

In landscape, it can be an individual specimen, or planted in mass creating a larger impact in fall. Each spring, clumps need to be cut back to 6-10 inches tall to remove dead flower stalks and to promote fresh new leaf growth for summer months. Separating clumps is recommended every 2-3 years.



Gulf Muhly is found in many Eastern and Central states including Texas, naturally extending to Guatemala. It has adapted to a wide range of habitats including sandy soils, coastal and central prairies, sunny openings and dry, exposed ledges.

See Gulf Muhly specimens in front of the Orchid Conservatory, and in Earthkind Gardens.