

Gardens in Bloom

(week of Nov 1, 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!

'HANNAH RAY' WEEPING BOTTLEBRUSH (*Callistemon viminalis* 'Hannah Ray')

Bottlebrush are native to Australia but are grown throughout much of the world. Most varieties are Zone 9 plants tolerating temperatures to the mid 20s.

Mature "Hannah Ray" trees reach 15-20 feet tall. Compared to dwarf and standard red varieties, its rapid growth creates longer thinner branches, in a graceful, slightly weeping form, especially when flowering. Leaves also are slightly thinner, longer and softer-textured than the standard red bottlebrush (*C. citrinus*), or 'Little John' dwarf.

With dark pink, nearly red flowers, closer inspection reveals not a single flower on a branch, but many flower buds opening at once, with thin petals, pistils and stamen resembling bristles--thus its common name. Flower blossoms last several weeks, with 2-3 bloom cycles a year. It can be trimmed into tree form, or pruned to a large shrub or hedge with annual cut backs. If a hedge, infrequent cutting is recommended to prevent removal of flower buds various times a year. Bottlebrush are excellent hummingbird and butterfly attractors.



See 'Hannah Ray' trees along the Bromeliad Conservatory walkway; on the Staples Street fence; and in Hummingbird Garden.

MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD (*Tagetes lucida*)

Mexican Mint Marigold is a South Texas native herb, endemic to Mexico and southwestern United States. Also called *Spanish*, *Texas*, or *Mexican Tarragon*, it's used as a spice in Central American cooking, and as an alternative to French tarragon. The narrow inch-long leaves have a licorice or anise scent when crushed.

This plant is in the same genus as the traditional French and African marigold varieties used as bedding plants. Its bright yellow flowers are about one-half inch wide, but appear in clusters providing a color burst starting late summer, peaking in October/November. Its perennial nature and compact form requires little care, being drought and heat tolerant. Its bloom time and distribution makes it a natural choice for *Día de los Muertos* celebrations.



A compact mounding bush 12-18 inches tall, plants will spread over time, but can be divided every 2-3 years encouraging new growth. Mexican Mint Marigold provides nectar for migrating butterflies and pollen for native honeybees.

Besides cooking, it is used in herbal teas which may help with upset stomach, stimulating the appetite and is a diuretic. Historically, Aztecs reportedly used it as flavoring in cocoa-like drinks, as well as an anesthetic, and in ritual sacrificial ceremonies.

See Mexican Mint Marigold in the EarthKind Trial Gardens, and on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden.