

Gardens in Bloom

(week of Nov 8, 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!

PENTAS (*Pentas lanceolate*)

Pentas, also known as *Egyptian Star Clusters*, are a great perennial for South Texas landscapes, lasting several years in pots or landscape. Although commonly grown here, they originate in the Arabian peninsula and Eastern Africa.

Colors include red, pink, white and purple. Pentas mature at 12-24 inches depending on variety. Some older ones may grow taller, especially in shade, but newer varieties are bred for compactness, flower color and prolific blooming. Individual flowers are approximately a quarter-inch across, but clusters can be 2-3 inches making a strong impact! Individual flowers open over time making each cluster last for months, providing consistent color in gardens. If flowering diminishes, deadhead the old blossoms to encourage new ones. Pentas prefer good drainage and regular watering, but do not like “wet feet.”



See Pentas in the Butterfly Garden and Butterfly House with *Lucky Star Violet* and *Lucky Star Dark Red* our primary varieties. Though perennial, they often are replaced after 2-3 years with new plants for more vigor and flowering.

PADRE ISLAND MISTFLOWER (*Conoclinium betonicifolium*)

Padre Island Mistflower is a low-growing groundcover form of *Conoclinium*, in the aster family (Asteraceae), with clusters of tiny light blue flowers when seen in mass has a misty or cloudy appearance, resulting in its common name. It also is known as *betonyleaf mistflower* and *betonyleaf thoroughwort* in other regions, due to the 1-inch elongated heart shape resembling *Texas Betony*.

This mistflower has thick, waxy-coated leaves and is more durable than others. Native to most Texas coastal areas, it handles wind and salt spray better than other *Conoclinium* species, an adaption making it durable in sandy, island landscapes.

Padre Island Mistflower also is a butterfly magnet, flowering throughout the year, but saving lots of blossoms for fall and winter migrating butterflies. The sturdy nature of the leaves and stems lets it keep growing during mild winters, unlike its Central Texas cousin, Gregg’s mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*), which goes dormant and freezes to ground level each year.



See Padre Island Mistflower in front of Education Station, 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, so look for lots of fluttering!