

WHAT'S BLOOMING?

(week of October 18, 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, as well as health and safety of our guests. Carrying out its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, the Botanical Gardens brings us **WHAT'S BLOOMING**, each week spotlighting a featured blooming plant in the Exhibit Area; and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or consider for your landscape!

YELLOW BUTTERFLY VINE (*Mascagnia macroptera*)

While yellow butterfly vine does attract fluttering Lepidoptera pollinators, its common name comes from the papery seed pods, not insect attraction. Its dainty clusters of five-petal half-inch flowers provide color throughout summer and fall, making a stunning contrast against bright green foliage.

Native to Mexico, it sometimes is listed as a Central America native, but has been reported as far south as Brazil. It is a Zone 8 plant allowing it to grow throughout central Texas, but may freeze to the ground or need cold protection moving further north. In South Texas, our moderate winters keeping it evergreen, retaining foliage all winter, providing greenery when other vines are just brown and gray stems.

This vine can reach 15-20 feet long, making impressive showings on trellis, fence or arbor. It can grow in partial shade, but does better in hot, sunny locations.

After being pollinated, seed pods form in a unique butterfly shape. Beginning as pale yellow-green, drying to an orange-brown color, the pods then can be carefully removed and used for crafts, frequently painted and glittered.

See Butterfly Vine on trellises in the Tropical Garden providing a visual barrier from South Staples Street.

MEALY SAGE (*Salvia farinacea*)

Mealy Sage, native to Central and West Texas and New Mexico, has spread to California, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Florida, and even Ohio. It is well adapted to a wide range of soils found in prairie, meadows, roadsides, edges of forests and even dry calcareous soils of West Texas.

It typically grows 12-24 inches, reseeds and produces multiple plants creating a mound blooming short spikes of medium to light blue flowers with variations ranging to white. Usually, one to three tubular flowers open at a time on each flower spike, providing blossoms for months spring to frost. If flowering slows, removing spent flower spikes encourages more blossoms.

While the native form is shorter, one selection, *Henry Duelberg*, collected from a cemetery by noted Texas plantsman Greg Grant, was named a Texas Superstar by Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service. It has dark blue flowers and slightly taller, dense foliage compared to most wild varieties. Other shorter cultivars include *Victoria Blue*, *Strata*, and *Blue Bedder*, but *Duelberg* far outperforms the others. The shorter native forms can be cut back in early spring if clean-up is needed. New growth and seedlings usually emerge, making it an informal perennial option.

Heavy fall flowering makes it a great plant for color and migrating butterflies. A good pollinator plant, it attracts a wide range of hummingbirds and bees.

See shorter varieties of both blue and white Mealy Sage in Earthkind Garden raised beds. The taller Duelberg Sage grows there, and in Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens.

