

Gardens in Bloom

(week of October 25, 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 blooming plant and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or enhance your landscape!

QUEEN EMMA CRINUM LILY (*Crinum augustum*)

“Queen Emma” is a tall crinum lily native to tropical Southeast Asia. Impressive flower stalks stretching 3-4 feet tall have numerous white and purplish flowers with long, thin petals. It can reach 6 feet with broad, strap-like leaves 3-4 feet long, growing in full sun or shade, with maroon-toned leaves in brighter light. Plants tend to form clumps with smaller “pups” emerging near the base, which can be removed to keep the plant narrower and more individual.

Crinums are swamp plants, but *can* tolerate dry soil for short periods due to their large bulb, making them a great addition to South Texas tropical gardens. Crinum lilies are among the easiest lilies which readily bloom, taking little or no care. Being tropical, they don’t need cold weather to re-bloom. Considered a Zone 10 plant, it has grown in our slightly colder Zone 9 without freezing, although protection is recommended. They also are salt-tolerant providing another coastal landscape option.

See “Queen Emma” crinums in behind the Visitor Center, as well in front of the Orchid Conservatory, and near the smaller tortoise enclosure.



TURK’S CAP (*Malvaviscus aroreus* var. *drummondii*)

Turk’s Cap probably is the most well-known native of the Cotton/Hibiscus family (*Malvaceae*). Common names include *Drummond Turk’s Cap*, *Drummond’s Wax Mallow*, *Red Mallow*, *Texas Mallow*, *Mexican Apple*, *Sleeping Hibiscus*, *Bleeding Hearts*. The most common Spanish name is *Manzanita* which means “little apple,” noting its small fruit.

This native shrub is distributed throughout much of Texas, as an understory plant in light shade, but also growing in full sun. The native form reaches 3-5 feet tall and about 3 feet wide, with shade-grown plants taller from stem elongation. As an understory plant, it does best in well-drained soils with organic matter, but can adapt to poorer soils.

Red 1-inch long flowers emerge from branch tips, but never fully open, resembling rolled paper. Yellow pollen on fused stamen and pistil protrude past the petals. Pollinated flowers produce nickel-sized green fruit, eventually turning red when ripe.

While the native form usually is found with red flowers, there is a readily-available pale pink, and rarer white variety, along with a variegated leaf form. A much larger “tropical” has leaves 4 inches wide and 4-6 inches long, much more pointed than on the Texas native. Flowers on this shrub are larger, heavier and more pendulous. Most biologists consider this variety to be the same species--an adaptation over time.

Turk’s Cap, an excellent wildlife food source, provides nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies, moths and other insects. The fruit, eaten by mammals including humans, reportedly has a faint apple taste, cooked or raw, according the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (www.wildflower.org).

See native forms of red Turk’s Cap in Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens and Oso Ridge nature trail; pink in EarthKind and Sensory Gardens.

