

WHAT'S BLOOMING?

(week of September 27, 2020)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently cannot offer Saturday morning classes, weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, or Orchid-ology series, due to State of Texas COVID-19 protocols, as well as health and safety of our guests.

Carrying out its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, the Botanical Gardens brings us **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlighting a featured blooming plant in the Exhibit Area; and native in or near the Habitat and Trails area—to enjoy on a visit this week, and even consider for your landscape!

ORCHID (*Cattleya bowringiana*)

Cattleya bowringiana is one of the most consistent fall-blooming orchids. Flower stems produce clusters of 10 to 12 striking purple flowers about 2.5 inches wide lasting for several weeks in September and October. One pot easily can produce two to five flower spikes with 50-plus blossoms, making a stunning display.

C. bowringiana is native to Belize and Guatemala where it grows in a wide range of environments including tropical forests, rocky ravines and occasionally in quartz sand. Orchid growers consider it one of the easiest orchids, and a great starter plant for the novice grower. It has been widely used in hybridizing since its discovery in 1885, due to consistent blooming.



See multiple specimens of *Cattleya bowringiana* in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, and growing in pots along the walkway to our Butterfly Garden.

TEXAS SAGE (*Leucophyllum frutescens*)

This common Texas native shrub—also known as *Cenizo*, *Purple Sage*, *Texas Ranger*, *Texas Barometer Bush*, and *Texas Silverleaf*—thrives in much of south and west Texas. Natural stands of Texas Sage are visible in the caliche “hills” along I-69 near Mathis, easily identifiable while in bloom. This ideal Xeriscape (water-wise) plant is popular in commercial and residential landscapes, blooming now with recent rains, many appearing solid purple with thousands of blooms present—a survival mechanism for our semi-arid conditions.



Its silvery foliage color comes from tiny light-reflecting hairs helping protect it from dense sun. Light purple one-inch bell-shaped flowers often have white and purple spots in the throat of the blossom. Light purple is its most common color, although a wine-colored variety has become frequent, as well as solid white forms. “Green Cloud” variety has fewer leaf hairs and more chlorophyll, its foliage appearing more green than gray.

Plants typically mature at 4-6 feet tall and wide. Pruning in landscapes will produce dense branching, but in nature, they often look scraggly when growing in caliche outcroppings. Newer cultivars have more compact growth. Gardeners also should note it does not like “wet feet” requiring good drainage to prevent root rot.

Texas Sage also attracts butterflies and moths, both as a nectar plant and as the larval host plant for Calleta silk moth (*Eupackardia calleta*) and the Theona Checkerspot (*Chlosyne theona*) butterfly. Hummingbirds also sip from the flowers when blooming during fall.

See Texas Sage in Arid, Sensory and Hummingbird Gardens.