

GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Jan. 17, 2021)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently offers limited classes, and no weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, 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 and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or possibly enhance your landscape!

CALENDULAS, Variety: 'Bon Bon' (*Calendula officinalis*)

Calendula is the local common name for these attractive bright yellow and orange flowering plants, although other parts of the world use “pot marigold” or “English marigold”, even though calendulas are in a different genus than traditional marigolds (*Tagetes* sp.). Believed to originate in southern Europe spreading through central and northern Europe, they later were introduced in the Americas.

Calendulas are annuals, which can be planted from seed, but most commonly from transplants in South Texas’ cooler months, blooming from October through May, able to take light frosts. Most retail varieties grow 8-18 inches tall with medium-sized simple grey-green leaves. As with other flowers in the daisy/sunflower family (*Asteraceae*), what we see as a single blossom actually is a composite of hundreds of tiny single flowers in a tight cluster. Flowers are about 3 inches across.

Calendulas need deadheading of spent flowers for re-bloom. They provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds; pollen for bees in cooler months; and are a larval plant for several moth species. Calendula flowers are used medicinally for wounds, rashes, infection and inflammation in homeopathic circles, but support evidence is lacking according to *WebMD*. Flower petals also were used in dyes and cosmetics in Ancient Greece and Rome.

See Calendulas in the Butterfly Garden.

FALSE RAGWEED (*Parthenium hysterophorus*)

Common called “False Ragweed,” this small herbaceous plant is a common white wildflower seen throughout South Texas. Other common names include *Santa Maria*, *Feverfew* and *Cicutilla*. While many consider it a native due to wide distribution in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas Coastal Plains, some speculate it originated in Tropical Americas, steadily moving northward.

Deeply-lobed aromatic leaves, with larger leaves up to 8 inches long, form a rosette near the base. Fewer, thinner 1-3 inch leaves grow on flower stalks, which reach 1-3 feet. Tiny white flowers, about one-quarter inch wide, resemble tiny cauliflowers up close! Most home gardeners consider this wildflower a weed; however, False Ragweed is a butterfly nectar source, especially in winter when flowers are few.

See False Ragweed in natural grassy areas along pathway connecting Arid and Sensory Gardens, and along nature trails.

