



# “Blooming in the Gardens” LIBRARY 2022



## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of December 25, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### SHIN SHIANG 'DIAMOND' ORCHID (*Potinara Shin Shiang* 'Diamond')

This orchid hybrid originated by Shin Shiang in 2003 as a cross of *Rhyncholaeliocattleya* Kat E-Sun x *Rlc.* Tzeng-Wen Beauty, with actually several variations of this plant.

This "cattleya-like hybrid" relatively compact orchid has bright green pseudobulbs/leaves about 8" tall. Each new pseudobulb produces only 1-2 blossoms; but what it lacks in number, it makes up for with color, definitely a show-stopper.

Each flower is approximately 3-3.5" across in traditional *Cattleya* corsage orchid form.

3 butter-yellow sepals to the rear of the blossom highlight a yellow central vein of its wide deep burgundy-purple petals with slightly ruffled edges & brilliant gold throat of the lip.



**Fall is prime bloom time for many *Cattleya* orchids. Shin Shiang 'Diamond' can be found in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory along with many other orchids that regularly bloom in fall, but are extending well into December & early January, brightening overcast winter days for our visitors!**

### AGARITA OR WILD CURRANT (*Mahonia trifoliolata*)

Agarita or Wild Currant looks a lot like holly due to its unique stiff, 3-lobed palmate leaves, each lobe/leaflet having multiple points. Despite its holly-like appearance, it actually is a member of the Barberry Family, *Berberidaceae*. Although not in bloom right now, the tough foliage survives our coldest South Texas winter weather, waiting for its late spring bloom. It is identifiable, even in winter when not flowering, due to its evergreen 3-lobed multi-pointed gray-green leaves.

This native shrub, common in South Texas brushlands, stretching west to Arizona & Northern Mexico. It can grow 3-8' tall & 3-4' wide. It has a range of common names (& spellings) depending on its location including Agarito, Algerita, Laredo Mahonia, Laredo Oregon-grape & Trifoliate Barberry.

Agarita produces clusters of golden cup-shaped 6-petaled flowers in late spring/early summer. When pollinated, flowers produce clusters of red berries at maturity are eaten by birds & wildlife; & can be made into jam, jelly, or wine. Quail & small mammals use it for cover. Roots provide a yellow dye used by pioneers, & seeds provided a coffee-substitute for early settlers.



**See Agarita naturally growing in several areas along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail. Unlike many natives, it can be found at private retail garden centers.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of December 18, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### EASY DOES IT FLORIBUNDA ROSE (*Rosa hybrida* 'Easy Does It')

'Easy Does It' is an exceptionally drought tolerant floribunda rose, producing orangey-apricot to honey pink blossoms often with dark pink speckled highlights. Medium-sized flowers with ruffled petals can be up to 3.5" in diameter with multiple buds on a branch often open at once.

Known for their round, compact shape, reaching 30" wide & 3-4' tall with dark, glossy green foliage, plants are disease resistant performing well in gardens all around the U.S. Cooler fall & winter temperatures allow roses to rebloom until cut back in mid-February for their spring bloom cycle.

'Easy Does It' was hybridized by Harkness New Roses crossing 'Baby Love' with a hybrid of 'Queen Charlotte' X 'Della Balfour.' Released in 2010 by Weeks Roses, it was an All-American Award winner that year!



**See a group of blooming 'Easy Does It' floribundas in the front raised bed on the Rose Pavilion' south side.**

### PRAIRIE ASTER (*Aster subulatus*)

Prairie Aster, or Hierba Del Marrano in Mexico, is an annual native flower easily overlooked in regularly mowed lawns & fields. When left unpruned by mowers, it can mature at 3-4'. In a mowed area, you'll find a 2-4" plant with small daisy-shaped pale lavender petals & yellow centers. Mowed or not, this plant is a survivor through harsh conditions including drought due to a deep taproot.

Prairie Aster easily grows in swales, ditches & other poorly drained areas in our Coastal Prairies & Rio Grande Plains. Cattle & white-tail deer commonly browse on its simple, narrow leaves keeping it shorter in fields even without mowing. Butterflies nectar in winter on the small lavender flowers approximately 3/4" across abundant in late fall, winter & early spring.



**See larger Prairie Aster along the Brennecke Nature Trail; & compact mowed flowering plants in grass fields near the Earthkind Demonstration Garden & between the Arid Garden & Playground.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of December 11, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### FASCINATION VITEX (*Vitex trifolia* var. *purpurea* 'Fascination')

Fascination Vitex, sometimes called Arabian Lilac in other regions, is actually an Australian native. A relative of the popular Texas Lavender or Vitex Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*), this plant tends to have a more sprawling form making it a better shrub or informal hedge than ornamental tree. Fascination vitex is a member of the Mint Family (Lamiaceae) making it a cousin of many herbs, salvias & coleus.

Plants can reach 12' tall, & similar width. It forms 3-4" flower spikes with  $\frac{3}{4}$ " lavender blossoms opening from bottom of the spike to top, typically blooming from early summer until frost. The real fascination, however, is the foliage. While the tops of the compound palmate leaves appear a dark gray-green, the bottom sides are velvety-purple and give a surprising color when the wind blows through the stems, at least until cold weather triggers its temporary deciduousness.

**See a nice specimen located across from the entrance to Monkey Mansion Playground.**



### TEXAS LANTANA (*Lantana urticoides*)

Texas Lantana is a consistent summer bloomer, even in heat & drought. While many lantana varieties are available in nurseries, the true Texas native form has clusters of small orange tubular blossoms. The native lantana had the scientific name *Lantana horrida*, with the species referring to the pungent smell hairy stems & leaves & that often result in skin irritation; however, the species name was changed in the 1990s to *urticoides* which means "like a nettle" due to hairy nature.

The plant has an upright form that commonly grows 3-4' tall but can appear larger if it gets support from fences or nearby plants when young. This form of lantana is deciduous, dropping leaves during cooler months and leaving bare stems in the landscape.

Dark purple/black berries are a treat for birds, but toxic to most mammals including humans & cattle due to presence of pentacyclic triterpenoids that are most concentrated in un-ripened green berries. Bees use nectar for honey production. It is a key nectar source for butterflies & migratory butterflies. It is also the larval plant for hairstreak butterflies. Stems are very strong & bendable & was sometimes used for basket weaving by pioneers. Lantana is a member of the Verbenaceae Family (Verbenaceae) along with verbenas, vervains, & Texas kidneywood a.k.a. beebush (*Aloysia gratissima*).



**Specimens currently are blooming in the Butterfly Garden with others in Hummingbird, Earthkind Gardens & Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of December 4, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'TEXAS TWO-STEP' POINSETTIA (*Euphorbia pulcherrima* 'Texas Two-Step')

Poinsettias are members of the spurge or euphorbia family along with pencil cactus & crown of thorns. Euphorbias have a milky white latex sap, a skin & eye irritant. Sometimes called "Jingle Bells," 'Texas Two-Step' has attractive red bracts with white speckles.

Actual poinsettia flowers are tiny yellow centers called cyathia. The colorful bracts we associate as blooms actually are colorful leaves used to attract pollinators to the smaller flower. Bracts change from green to colors in late fall & winter due to extended, dark uninterrupted nights; but most horticulturists simply call them "short-day" plants.

Native to Southern Mexico & Central America, naturally occurring plants may reach 10', but plant breeding & use of plant growth regulators have reduced size of the plant available in commercial outlets. Poinsettias can be planted in the ground in the Coastal Bend if they are protected from cold weather, wind & night lighting in fall.



**See Texas Two-Step Poinsettias in the Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory with 80 other solid colored plants in the stunning Holly-Days poinsettia Christmas tree, thanks to our friends at H-E-B!**

### CAMPHOR DAISY (*Rayjacksonia phyllocephala*)

Camphor Daisy, often called Golden Aster, is a member of the Aster/Sunflower Family, Asteraceae. As an emergent annual wildflower, it commonly is found in areas with poor soils along with its cousin, Sea Ox-Eye Daisy (*Borrchia frutescens*). It grows along sand dunes, wet salt flats or in pinelands & dry fields in Texas, Louisiana, Florida & Colorado.

Bright yellow, daisy-shaped flowers with yellow centers about an inch across can be found on plants much of the year, but particularly September-December. Pollinated flowers produce a small white fruit containing a single seed with hair-like extensions similar to a dandelion, seed which helps it disperse to nearby areas.



Camphor Daisy appears either upright or somewhat sprawling, about 12-24" tall. It is recognized by its light-medium green, serrated leaves which may become more succulent as they age. Both stems & leaves appear hairy. When leaves are crushed, they produce a camphor scent.

**See Camphor Daisy blooming along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Nov. 27, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### FIRECRACKER PLANT (*Russelia equisetiformis*)

Moving toward the holidays, one forgotten fall landscape superstar is Firecracker Plant. Often associated with July blooms due to its name, this plant blooms nearly year-round, providing brilliant color, & nectar for hummingbirds until freezing weather hits. Blossoming branches also can be cut & used as filler flowers & greenery in holiday floral designs.

Its clusters of tubular inch-long blossoms look like small firecrackers that have burst open on one end. They frequently cover weeping bright green branches that have few true leaves. Firecracker plant works well as a potted plant or in the ground, thriving in full sun or partial shade. Mature landscape forms produce stems 3-5' in the air.

Severe annual pruning in early spring helps clean out dead branches keeping plants shorter.

This adapted plant grows in a wide range of conditions. It also is an excellent hummingbird plant, blooming constantly from spring migration through summer and past fall migration. It also is the larval plant for Common Buckeye butterfly, so expect caterpillars to periodically feed on the leaves.

**See a hedge of Firecracker Plant as you enter the Botanical Gardens with additional plants in the Hummingbird Garden, Butterfly Hill & Butterfly House.**

### SKELETON-LEAF GOLDENEYE

(*Viguiera stenoloba*)

Also known as Resin Bush, Skeleton-leaf Goldeneye has proven a consistent bloomer from late spring until temperatures drop into the 30s. The individual 1-inch golden-yellow daisy-like flowers have large yellow ray-type centers which led to its common name "goldeneye." Flowering seems more prolific in fall, providing nectar for butterflies & pollen for bees.

Native to dry areas from the Rio Grande Valley to the Edwards Plateau & West into New Mexico, it is a great water-wise plant for landscapes, performing best in full sun after established. It naturally occurs in caliche soils but grows in other soils with good drainage.

This densely branched shrub grows into a round form 2-4' tall. The common name skeleton-leaf comes from the deeply serrated foliage producing a fine, almost lacy texture at a distance. In native regions it is evergreen, holding leaves all winter. Further north, it will drop leaves & freeze to the base, coming back from roots. Leaves are very aromatic due to essential oils which why it sometimes is called Resin Bush.

**See Skeleton-Leaf specimens in the Butterfly House & Garden, on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden & Hummingbird Garden entry.**



## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Nov. 20, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### PETRA CROTON (*Codiaeum variegatum* 'Petra')

Although it's not blooms that catch your attention, fall is a great time to enjoy colorful foliage of crotons! This 'Petra' croton has been growing all summer in full sun which changes leaf color from green to brilliant yellows, oranges & reds, perfect to naturally add a splash of fall to patios.

Crotons are tropical members of the Euphorbia Family (Euphorbiaceae) & cousins of poinsettias, pencil cactus & crown of thorns, although they don't have succulent stems. These woody shrubs are native to Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia & Western Pacific Islands, coming in a wide variety of leaf shapes & colors.

While most people grow them in patio pots, our mild winters allow crotons to be planted in the ground in protected areas. Petra usually grows 3-4' tall, but can reach 5+' with age. Traditional pinnate leaves are 3-4" wide & 6-8" long with distinctive veining--the first portion to change color in sun. The areas between follow & may become entirely yellow in full sun. Leaves may mature with a slight rippled effect along the edge.



**See a potted Petra Croton specimen by our Entrance gazebo leading to the Visitors Center. Other varieties are found in the Tropical Garden.**

### CHILE PEQUIN (*Capiscum annuum*)

Chile Pequin, aka Turkey Pepper or Bird Pepper, is a native hot pepper naturally found on the Eastern US seaboard from Maryland to Florida, west to Arizona & Utah, & south into Central America; & is a critical fall/winter food source for birds which digest the hot fruit depositing seeds in nearby locations.

Compact plants grow 1-3' tall with 1" spade-shape bright green leaves. Plants form individual tiny white flowers ¼ to ½" inch wide which form ½" round or slightly elongated peppers turning red at maturity.

Plants typically remain evergreen in our area due to mild winter temperatures, but are deciduous in colder locations, going dormant and dropping leaves. Fruit are very hot with high concentrations of capsaicinoids, the pharmacologically active compounds that give hot peppers their spice. Chile Pequins have a rating of 30,000 to 50,000 Scoville Units, making them 5 to 8 times hotter than jalapenos. You don't have to ingest them to experience the burn, so wash hands thoroughly after picking; & avoid rubbing eyes to prevent severe burning/irritation.



Plants prefer moist soil but survive drier conditions once established. Growing in a wide range of soils, including clay, sand, loams and caliche mixes, good drainage is critical.

**See Chile Pequins on Butterfly Hill, and along the nature trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Nov. 13, 2022)

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### SHRIMP PLANT (*Justicia brandegeana*)

This herbaceous perennial technically is a tropical native to Mexico, blooming nearly year-round, providing a nectar source for butterflies & hummingbirds until a freeze. Flower inflorescence primarily is made up of modified leaves called bracts, with long-lasting rosy-pink color, resembling the segmented body of a shrimp. Tubular white flowers with pink/maroon lip emerge from the bracts. Each "shrimp" inflorescence may produce 20-30 white flowers over a 1-2 month period.



The green stems of shrimp plant have distinct segmented sections between slightly fuzzy green leaves about 1" wide & 2-3" long. Additional branches may emerge at the stem joints. Plants typically grow 2-3' tall & about 3' wide. As branches fall over, they can root when they touch the ground for easy propagation.

Shrimp plant is a member of the Acanthus Family (Acanthaceae) along with Mexican petunias (*Ruellia* sp.), Flame Acanthus (*Anisicanthus quadrifidis* var. *wrightii*) & Polka Dot Plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*). It is extremely easy to grow in full sun or shade, but stems stretch in low light areas.

**See Shrimp plant blooming in the Butterfly, Sensory & Hummingbird Gardens, and Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden.**

### FIDDLEWOOD (*Citharexylum berlandieri*)

Fiddlewood is a woody member of the Verbenaceae Family (Verbenaceae) along with lantanas, vervains, frog fruit & vitex. "Fiddlewood" refers to other species of *Citharexylum* used to construct violins! This Texas native form has a number of common names including Berlandier's Fiddlewood, named after French-Swiss physician Jean Louis Berlandier (1805-1850) who collected plants in Texas & northern Mexico in the early 1800s. It also may be referenced as Tamaulipan Fiddlewood, Zitherwood, Negrito, Orcajuela, Encorba Gallina, Revienta-Cabra, Sauco Hediondo.



Fiddlewood blooms long clusters of tiny white, fragrant flowers several times a year from February through November, creating a great nectar source for butterflies. After pollination, they produce orange-red berries eaten by songbirds. Fiddlewood has glossy dark green leaves approximately 1-1.5" wide & 3" long.

It is a large drought-tolerant shrub naturally growing in well-drained clay & clay loam soils in brush thickets along Coastal & Rio Grande Plains. While commonly 6-10', tall, it may reach 18' in moist conditions. Plants can be trimmed into dense shrubs or small trees, growing in full sun or partial shade.

**See both blooming & berried Fiddlewood dens between the Butterfly House & Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Nov. 6, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### WHITE ANGEL TRUMPET (*Brugmansia sp.*)

White Angel Trumpet is a large tropical growing up to 8' tall in our region. Large elegant flowers about 8" inches long & 6" across form on branch tips hanging down resembling trumpets from heaven, thus its common name. A close cousin is the genus *Datura* with erect, upward pointing blossoms, and sometimes are called "Devil Trumpets."

Angel Trumpet flowers appear 3-4 times yearly, plants often covered with multiple large blossoms, in 1-3 week bloom cycles. Flowers are extremely fragrant, especially in evening & early morning with calm winds. Besides white, *Brugmansia* varieties come in pink, peach, & yellow tones.

Its tropical nature makes Angel Trumpet susceptible to freezing temperatures, but established plants here usually grow back from the base. *Brugmansia* species are native to South America from Venezuela to Northern Chile where they were used by shaman for their hallucinogenic properties. Although beautiful, all parts of the plant are highly toxic if ingested.

Angel Trumpets are part of the night-shade family, Solonaceae, along with many favorite warm-season vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, eggplant & potatoes.

**See White Angel Trumpet in the Tropical Garden.**



### BLUE MISTFLOWER or CRUCITA (*Chromolaena odoratum*)

Blue Mistflower or Crucita is a tall-growing native mistflower, closely related to Padre Island Mistflower (*Conoclinium betonifolia*) & Gregg's Mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*), all in the aster/sunflower family, Asteraceae. All these plants previously were in genus *Eupatorium*, but were divided into new genera in recent years. It has a wide range of common names in different regions including Fragrant Mistflower, Crucita, Fall Mistflower, Blue Boneset, Fragrant Boneset, Jack In The Bush, Siam Weed, Common Flossflower, Christmas Bush & Devilweed.

Like its cousins, Blue Mistflower has clusters of tiny light blue flowers with small thin petals giving a blue misty appearance in mass. Plants commonly grow 24-36" tall making a nice accent in informal gardens with bright green pointed leaves having a pungent scent when crushed, resulting in species name *odorata*.



While considered an annual since it dies out in colder climates, it can be treated like a perennial here when we have mild winters, requiring spring cutback to keep its full appearance. It also grows quickly from seeds dispersed by wind, which sprout in nearby areas each year & can produce large plants in a few months. Blue mistflower grows naturally from Mexico & Texas along the Southern US & into the Caribbean.

**See Blue Mistflower in the Butterfly Garden, on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden & in pockets along the Brennecke Nature Trail, all currently blooming this autumn hence the other local common name, Fall Mistflower.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Oct. 30, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### CONFEDERATE ROSE (*Hibiscus mutabilis*)

Confederate rose (*Hibiscus mutabilis*) is a cold-hardy, semi-woody flowering perennial plant known for large, semi-double light pink flowers on top of towering stems—often trimmed into small multi-trunked ornamental trees 9-15' tall. Other common names include Dixie Rose Mallow, Cotton Rose or Cotton Rose Mallow. Although native to Southern China & Taiwan, in the Southern U.S., Confederate Rose is considered an heirloom plant, popular in past decades in southern gardens & a “pass-along” plant sharing cuttings with neighbors.

Large mounding semi-double light pink flowers are the prize of Confederate Rose. Even on the same plant, flowers may vary showing yellow stamen on flowers with fewer petals, while nearby blossoms may be a complete mound of light pink totally hiding the flower's center. Colors may vary from white to medium pink. Large medium green palmate leaves 4-6" wide provide shade to companion plantings in the summer and a backdrop to the showy, pink mounding blossoms.

This hardy perennial large shrub or small tree may freeze back in when extreme temperatures dip into the lower 20s for extended periods; but will re-sprout in our region. Confederate Rose is in the Mallow Family (Malvaceae) & a close relative of Texas natives Swamp Mallow a.k.a. Texas Star Hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*) & Turk's Cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii*), along with tropical hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) & cotton (*Gossypium* sp.).

See Confederate rose behind the Butterfly House.

### MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD (*Tagetes lucida*)

Mexican Mint Marigold, a South Texas native herb, also sometimes is called Spanish, Texas, or Mexican Tarragon, used as a spice in Central American cooking, & an alternative to French Tarragon. It is endemic to Mexico & the Southwest U.S.

Its bright yellow flowers are about .5" wide, in clusters providing a burst of color starting late summer, currently at its peak in fall! Its bloom time & native distribution led to common use in *Dia de los Muertos* celebrations. It produces a compact mounding bush 12-18" tall with its yellow flowers contrasting with narrow 1" long fragrant leaves. Plants will spread over time, but respond well to dividing clumps every 2-3 years encouraging new growth.

Mexican Mint Marigold is in the same genus as traditional French & African marigolds used as bedding plants. It provides nectar for migrating butterflies & pollen for native honeybees. Its perennial nature & compact form requires little care, being drought & heat tolerant.

Leaves are used in cooking for a licorice or anise scent & flavoring. It also is used in herbal teas which may help with upset stomach, stimulating appetite & is a diuretic. Historically, Aztecs reported used it as a flavoring in a cocoa-like drink, and medicinal use as an anesthetic and in ritual sacrificial ceremonies.

See Mexican Mint Marigold in the Butterfly, Sensory & EarthKind Demonstration Gardens.



## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Oct. 23, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### PORTIA CATTLIANTHE ORCHID (*Cattlianthe* 'Portia')

*Cattlianthe* 'Portia,' formerly *Cattleya* 'Portia,' is considered by many experts among the finest & most spectacular *Cattleya* hybrids ever bred. First registered by James Veitch & Son in 1897, then as *C.* 'Portia' by H.G. Alexander in 1927, both have received many awards from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) & American Orchid Society (AOS). *Cattleya* Portia 'Cannizaro,' received Award of Merit (AM) from RHS in 1936, & AOS in 1951.

Flowers are about 3.5" wide with a darker purple lip & golden-yellow highlight in the throat. Flower stems often produce a cluster of 8-12 blossoms with multiple stalks on larger plants. Flowering plants can reach 24-30" tall. Its popularity continues for consistent blooming each fall, & proving an easy variety for beginning orchid growers.



'Portia' is a primary hybrid—a cross of 2 species, *Guarianthe bowringiana* (formerly *C. bowringiana* a.k.a. Autumn Pixie Orchid) x *Cattleya labiata*. *Cattlianthe* 'Portia' produces an intermediate size plant with 7-12 brilliant purple blossoms on tall heads above the pseudobulbs.

**Visit the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory to see multiple *C. Portia* specimens currently in bloom, greeting guests with an impressive explosion of color!**

### GULF MUHLY GRASS (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)

Gulf Muhly Grass, indigenous to many Eastern & Central states including Texas, naturally extending south to Guatemala, provides a spectacular display of unexpected color each fall, from September into January, depending on temperature and precipitation. The rest of the year, it has narrow 24-30" gray-green leaves creating distinctive clumps in the landscape. However, the true beauty of this plant are delicate seed heads towering 3-5', creating a shimmering pink/lavender cloud dancing in the wind.

Gulf Muhly has adapted to a wide range of sandy soils, coastal & central prairies, sunny openings and dry, exposed ledges. Gardeners use it as both an individual grass clump or planted mass to create a larger impact in fall. Clumps need to be cut back to 6-10" tall each spring to remove dead flower stalks promoting fresh new leaf growth for summer months. Separating clumps also is also recommended every 2-3 years.



**See Gulf Muhly specimens in front of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, & Earthkind Demonstration Garden.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Oct. 16, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### PENANG PEACH PLUMERIA (Plumeria Rubra 'Penang Peach')

Penang Peach is a stunning plumeria cultivar discovered in Malaysia, thought to originate on Penang Island where it grew in abundance along the coast many years ago. Plumeria, also known as frangipani, often used in authentic Hawaiian leis, always are favorite flowers for semi-tropical climates like ours, although native to tropical Americas.

This stunning cultivar produces 3" overlapped flowers with rays of peach, pink, & golden yellow, complimented with a sweet frangipani scent. This plumeria also forms a small tree, ideal for smaller spaces. Penang Peach is a top cultivar with compact growth habit, profuse bloom, & thick petals for longer bloom. It's fragrance & blossom abundance makes it 1 of the best varieties for leis! It goes by several aliases in the Plumeria world including *Thai Gold*, *Thai Yellow*, *Thai Salmon*, *Som Kalisin*, and *Malaysia*.



**Be sure to see the Plumeria Garden this month! Tropical plumeria are susceptible to freezing temperatures, so Plumeria Society of South Texas volunteers will prepare plants for winter storage removing leaves November 5; then relocating bareroot plants to winter greenhouse storage November 12, where they remain until mid-March. Once replanted outdoors, plants begin re-leafing in April, with first blossoms returning in May.**

### FALL ASTER (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*--formerly *Aster oblongifolius*)

Fall aster is a spectacular flowering Central Texas native, producing hundreds of lavender daisy-like blossoms covering the entire mounding plant! Plants typically grow about 20" tall & may spread 30-36". Between bloom cycles, plants produce a dense mound of moss-green foliage in butterfly & perennial gardens when planted in a sunny area with good drainage.

Despite its common name, Fall Aster also sporadically blooms in spring, but fall bloom is the more consistent. Other common names in different regions include *Aromatic Aster*, *Aromatic American Aster*, *Wild Blue Aster*, and *Shale Aster*. Adaptation to a wide range of soils including sand, loam clay & caliche allows a wide natural distribution from North Carolina to Pennsylvania, west to Montana, down Great Plains states south through Texas into Tamaulipas, Mexico.



Fall asters are members of the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*) along with daisies, chrysanthemums, cosmos & gaillardia. Like other ray-flowers, the daisy-like blossom is a collection of tiny nectar-producing flowers forming the distinctive yellow center "eye" of what we see as an individual bloom. The ray-flower design provides an efficient landing spot for bees & butterflies looking for nectar.

**See blooming Fall Asters in the Butterfly Garden.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Oct. 9, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'INSPIRATION' PASSION FLOWER (*Passiflora X 'Inspiration'*)

'Inspiration' Passion Vine, or Passion Flower, is a vigorous-growing vine producing elegant purple blossoms contrasting with large-lobed leaves alternating along its stem. The stem's twirling tendrils cling to objects supporting the vines.

In the late 1500s, Roman Catholic priests named it Passion Flower, since parts of the flower symbolize Passion of Jesus. Fused pistils appear like crucifixion spikes. A circle of hair-like rays above petals suggest a crown of thorns Jesus wore the day of His death. Five petals & five petal-like sepals represent 10 apostles remaining faithful to Jesus throughout the Passion (excluding Judas Iscariot & Simon Peter).

Passion flowers have their own family, Passifloraceae, with about 550 different species. 'Inspiration' was a cross of 2 species, *Passiflora incarnata* & tropical *Passiflora cinnicata*, resulting in vibrant color, consistent flowering, & fast growth. If you plant it, expect suckers to spring up nearby once the plant is established. Passion flowers are tropical & will freeze back in winter, but return from older stems or roots, even after severe freezes.

Passion Flowers are a host plant for local Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*) butterflies & less frequently-seen Zebra Longwings (*Heliconius charithonia*). Caterpillars will devour large numbers of leaves leaving bare vines at times, but new leaves & flower will appear.

See 'Inspiration' Passion Flower on a trellis behind the Caterpillar Topiary in the Butterfly Garden.



### TEXAS OR WILD POINSETTIA (*Euphorbia cyathophora*)

The Texas Poinsettia (*Euphorbia cyathophora*) is a short wildflower, in other regions called *Desert Poinsettia*, *Mexican Fireplant*, *Painted Euphorbia*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Paint Leaf*, or *Kaliko Plant*.

This native creates a colorful patchwork of green, scalloped alternate leaves with a noticeable red blotch at the base of each bract, which touches the base of the flower. One of the most old-fashioned, toughest plants found throughout South & Central Texas into Mexico.

The true flower of both this wild & traditional Christmas poinsettia actually are the bulbous yellow or green structures botanists term "cyathia," which we think of as the blossom's center. The colorful portion, usually called petals, are actually bracts--colorful leaves staying colorful longer attracting pollinators to the true flower. Bracts start coloring up in mid-summer, lasting until a freeze.



Wild poinsettias often are classified as annuals, but our mild winters let them grow multiple years. Wild Poinsettias reach 1-3' depending on amounts of water & sun. The colorful bracts & flowers attract butterflies, while leaves provide food for some sphinx moth caterpillars.

Wild poinsettia is the same genus as the traditional Christmas poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*), both members of the Spurge Family (Euphorbiaceae), along with other succulents Crown of Thorns (*Euphorbia milii*) & Pencil Cactus (*Euphorbia tirucalli*); but also common patio plants including colorful crotons (*Codeaeum variegatum*), jatrophas, & copper plants (*Acalypha wilkesiana*).

See Texas or Wild Poinsettias in Hummingbird Garden, & natural areas along nature trails.

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Oct. 2, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### BLUE BUTTERFLY BUSH (*Clerodendrum ugandense*)

While it doesn't attract butterflies, Blue Butterfly Bush's dainty flowers about .75" across resemble butterflies in flight. Petal arrangement mimics butterfly wings. Extended stamens look like antennae. Flowers are light blue & white, but are known for a true blue color, unlike many plants with blue-violet blossoms. It is a close cousin of other clerodendrum species like Bleeding Heart Vine (*Clerodendrum thomsoniae*) & Pagoda Plant (*C. paniculatum*).

This shrubby tropical grows to 10' tall & 5-6' wide. A Zone 8 plant, it a tropical shrub freezing back in extreme cold, although root hardy to at least 20°F. Blue Butterfly Bush is part of the Mint Family (Lamiaceae) with coleus, sages & many herbs. Native to tropical regions of East Africa, particularly Kenya & Uganda, it grows best in full sun or partial shade requiring well-drained soil.



See Blue Butterfly Bush in the Sensory Garden center raised bed.

### BLACK-EYED SUSAN (*Rudbeckia hirta*)

Black-Eyed Susan is a classic fall-flowering annual, native or naturalized in most of the Continental United States. Flowering summer through early fall, colors make it a natural favorite in fall months.

Its daisy-like ray flower configuration consists of a dark brown center protruding about 1" out from the blossom base, surrounded by bright yellow petals. Like other ray flowers in the Sunflower Family (Asteraceae), the center has true flower components containing pollen & nectar, a closer look showing tiny flower parts opening over several weeks. The single row of golden yellow petals 1-2" long attracts pollinators & humans alike to the inconspicuous true flowers in the dark brown center.

Black-Eyed Susan has slightly hairy medium green leaves growing in a small bush form close to the ground, with 12-18" of foliage; but flowers towering above reach 16-30". It grows naturally in sunny prairies, plains, meadows, pastures, savannas, woodland edges & other bright openings.



Attracting butterflies with its nectar, it's also the larval plant for Gorgone Checkerspot & Bordered Patch Butterflies; while seeds are eaten by birds. Ethnobotanical uses are varied & impressive. Native Americans used root tea for worms & colds, made an external wash for sores, snakebites & swelling, & root juice was used for earaches.

See Black-eyed Susan in the Butterfly Garden.

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Sept. 25, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'INCA GOLD' PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Inca Gold')

Plumeria are still in bloom, & bright lemon-yellow blossoms of Inca Gold should remain for guests until Plumeria are put to bed in greenhouse for winter, early in November. 'Inca Gold,' a variety from *Jungle Jack's Plumeria*, Vista, CA, is a large-flowering consistent bloomer with blossoms about 3.5" across with larger rounded petals almost completely bright yellow except for a slight white edge! This variety has semi-compact to medium growth habit more upright than other yellow plumeria, complimented by a slight citrus scent!

Plumeria are members of the Apocynaceae Family, also including Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*), Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*) & annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*).

Plumeria at the Botanical Gardens are in the ground March through October. In early November, the Plumeria Society of South Texas removes leaves, digs up plants, and stores bareroot in greenhouses to protect from temps below 40F.



**To see these tropical beauties one more time this season, visit the Plumeria Garden before November 1.**

### VIOLET RUELLIA or VIOLET PETUNIA (*Ruellia nudicaulis*)

Violet Ruellia is a low-growing late season wildflower native in the Deep South, from Alabama to Arizona, stretching from Texas deep into Mexico & Central America. From April-October, individual light violet 1-2" tubular flowers appear on stalks above low-growing gray-green foliage with 1" wide & 2" long oval leaves. Violet Ruellia foliage typically remains close to the ground 6-8" tall; but flower stalks can be 12-18 inches in shaded areas if unmanicured.

Violet Ruellia, found on edges of wooded areas & adjacent open grassy spaces, will reseed. But unlike its taller cousin, Mexican Petunia (*Ruellia simplex* a.k.a. *Ruellia brittoniana*), it does not form dense clumps of thick stems, allowing it to be easily mowed. It is an important larval plant for many butterflies including Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*), White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*), Cuban Crescent (*Anthanassa frisia*) & Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*). Flowers also provide nectar.



Although commonly called Wild Violet Petunia, Ruellia is in the Acanthus (Acanthaceae) Family, not Nightshade (Solonaceae) Family like traditional cultivated petunias. It may have medicinal uses, as its Spanish name is *Hierba de la Calentura*, or "herb of the fever".

**See this Ruellia in grassy areas behind the Sensory Garden, Butterfly Hill, & along nature trails, especially near Earthkind Demonstration & Arid Gardens.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Sept. 18, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### AUTUMN PIXIE ORCHID (*Cattleya bowringiana*)

*Cattleya bowringiana*, sometimes called “Autumn Pixie Orchid,” is one of the most consistent fall-blooming orchids, a must-have in home orchid collections. Flower stems produce clusters of 10-12 striking purple flowers about 2.5” wide lasting several weeks in September & October. Recent rains & cooler weather put those growing outside in baskets into full bloom! A standard 6-8” pot easily can have 2-5 flower spikes with 5-10 blossoms per spike--a stunning display!



Like most orchids, this plant will go unnoticed until it blooms, with pseudobulbs, often thought of as plain leaves, light to medium green and erect, usually 2-3” wide & 12-18 inches tall unless growing in large clumps.

Discovered in 1885, this orchid is native to Belize & Guatemala, growing in a wide range of environments including tropical forests, rocky ravines & occasionally quartz sand. Orchid growers consider it one of the easiest orchids, a great starter plant for the novice grower. Its consistent blooming has made it widely used in orchid breeding since discovered.

**See multiple specimens of *C. bowringiana* in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, & in pots along the Butterfly Garden walkway.**

### MEXICAN ORCHID TREE (*Bauhinia Mexicana*)

Mexican Orchid Tree, from deep South Texas, is a vigorous grower once established, reaching 8-12’ tall with similar width, identifiable by its 2-2.5” leaves with 2 distinctive points.

Blooming several times throughout warm months, Mexican Orchid Tree has white flowers with long narrow petals & stamen, appearing in clusters about 4-5” across, creating a frilly appearance. The blossoms are a great nectar source attracting a wide array of butterfly species and hummingbirds. It produces seedlings underneath for easy propagation, but it is not usually found in retail garden centers.



This is 1 of 2 native Texas orchid trees. Anaconcho Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia congesta*), a shorter species native to far west Texas, is noted for much smaller, rounded leaves & dwarf white flowers. They both are in the same genus as the more dramatic & larger growing Hong Kong Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia purpurea*). All are members of the Pea Family (Fabaceae) along with mesquite, retama & many other bean-producing native trees.

**See Mexican Orchid Tree past the Sensory Garden, across from Monkey Mansion entrance.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Sept. 11, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### PLAYBOY HIBISCUS (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* 'Playboy')

Playboy, an outstanding exotic hibiscus, definitely turns guests' heads walking into the "Gateway" Visitors Center entry garden, like on the "red carpet." One of the *Hollywood Hibiscus* collection, meant to be showstoppers of the hibiscus world, these flowers are rated G for "Grower & Garden Friendly, its Beautiful Blooms Suited For All Ages."

Like other hibiscus, Playboy can grow 3-6' tall, preferring full sun & good drainage to maximize summer flowering. Single flowers have 5 thick, showy red-orange petals with specks of gold standing out in a crowd. Flowers are 4-5" across. These plants are patented, having been bred for outstanding, long-lasting blossoms.

Hibiscus do best if cut back in early spring with organic fertilizers added promoting new growth & more flowers later in the season.



### TEXAS KIDNEYWOOD (*Eysenhardtia texana*)

Texas Kidneywood is a large shrubby member of the Pea Family (*Fabaceae*) along with other native cousins Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*), Huisache (*Acacia farnesiana*) & Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*). It reportedly was used for kidney & bladder ailments thus its common name. It also goes by Bee Brush, attracting lots of these pollinators along with butterflies, blooming profusely after significant rains May through Fall. Texas Kidneywood grows from Central Texas south into Central Mexico where it also is called White Brush, Vara Dulce, and Palo Dulce.

Flower spikes are 3.5-4.5" long with tiny white flowers about .25" across, opening during a 2-week period after rain events. This plant is deciduous, dropping leaves in winter. During warm seasons, the 3-10' multitrunked shrub is covered in thin light green leaves. Narrow compound leaves about 3.5" long have multiple leaflets often only .25-.5" long creating a dainty, texture in the South Texas brush.



**Texas Kidneywood can be found on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden, & Butterfly Garden.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Sept. 4, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### RAGIN' CAJUN RED RUELLIA (*Ruellia elegans* 'Rajin' Cajun')

Rajin' Cajun Ruellia, aka *Red Mexican Petunia*, has 1" red tubular flowers with 5 petals blooming late spring through fall. This variation of the taller-growing Brazilian Petunia, indigenous from Chile to Brazil, discovered at Dupont Nursery in Southern Louisiana, has adapted to high heat & humidity. Readily available in the retail market, it normally grows 18-24" tall, & can be planted in beds or large pots. Listed as a USDA Zone 8 perennial, it's cold tolerant for our milder Zone 9!



Also commonly called a *Brazilian petunia*, it is a different family from traditional annual petunias. Ruellia is in the Acanthus (Acanthaceae) Family with flame acanthus (*Anisacanthus quadrifidus*), Shrimp Plant (*Justicea brandegeana*), & Polka Dot Plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*) commonly known in our area from the 250 genera of this broad plant family.

Rajin' Cajun is a great-performing perennial attracting both hummingbirds & butterflies! Ruellias also are larval food for common buckeye butterflies, so don't be afraid if you see leaves being devoured by caterpillars; they are providing necessary larval food for caterpillars which transform into beautiful butterflies. Spring pruning allows this perennial to flush with new, fresh leaves, followed by non-stop flowers until freezing weather approaches.

**See large potted specimens of Ragin' Cajun Ruellia in the Butterfly House.**

### ANAQUA (*Ehretia anaqua*)

This medium-sized South Texas native tree can reach 50' tall, but usually only about 30' here. It has a coarse gray-brown bark trunk similar to live oak, up to 2' in diameter, but with deep ridges around the trunk. After heavy summer rains, Anaqua will be covered in clusters of tiny white star-shaped flowers with white stamen. These are frequently pollinated by bees & butterflies for an abundance of quarter-inch berries several weeks later, maturing to a golden-orange, providing food for songbirds & small mammals.



Anaqua produces dense shade with thick branching habits & lots of dark green oval 2-3" long coarse-textured leaves, giving it the name common name *Sandpaper Tree*. It also may be called "Knock-away" tree--a phonic derivative of "anaqua." The species name is a derivative of the Nahuatl (native Aztec) word for paper.

It grows in alkaline soils from San Antonio to coastal regions near Houston, down into the Rio Grande Valley & Mexico. It is a member of the Borage, or Forget-Me-Not Family (Boraginaceae), & a component of the remnants of RGV evergreen forests.

**See an excellent example of Anaqua in the Sensory Garden.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Aug 28, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'PINOT ROUGE' PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Pinot Rouge')

Plumeria 'Pinot Rouge' has bloomed consistently all summer, rare in a dark pink/red plumeria! The thick, wide petals extend individual blossom life despite summer heat. Each flower stalk has up to 30 blossoms, forming a cluster 8-10" across. Last year, it bloomed until removed early November for winter protection! This plumeria is not only an eye-catcher, but turns heads with its sweet vanilla-jasmine scent.

Plumeria are members of the Dogbane (Apocynaceae) Family, which includes Desert Rose, Oleanders & annual Vinca. They thrive in hot sunny conditions with peak bloom July through September in the Coastal Bend, with fewer blossoms as cold fronts begin making it south.



**Visit the Plumeria Garden before the end of October when plants will be prepped for their long winter greenhouse nap by the Plumeria Society of South Texas.**

### PINK TROPICAL SAGE (*Salvia coccinea*)

Tropical Sage is a great native for our area which thrives with little care! Native patches of are commonly found in sandy coastal regions from Texas east to Florida, up into South Carolina. This Zone 8 annual will survive most of our mild winters, but also comes back year after year from seed. A staple for hummingbirds and butterflies looking for nectar, the most common native form is red, but pink & white variations also occur.

Like other members of the Mint Family (Lamiaceae), it has characteristic square stems, bright green simple spade-shaped leaves, & abundant stalks of tubular flowers less than 1" long. This pink variation, sometimes sold as 'Pink Nymph', typically grows 18-30" in either full sun or partial shade, remaining more compact in bright light. The true native red form may grow tall & leggy, reaching 4-5' in shady areas under mesquite trees. If plants get too tall or leggy, pruning to 4-6 inches encourages new branching from the base with blooms quickly following.



Tropical sage is a consistent bloomer nearly year-round; but also a heavy seeder with volunteers found in other nearby flowerbeds.

**See pink Tropical Sage in Butterfly, Sensory & Earthkind Demonstration Gardens. Native red forms can be viewed along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Aug 21, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### FIRECRACKER PLANT (*Russelia equisetiformis*)

Firecracker Plant, a phenomenal bloomer throughout the year, continues to produce bursts of hot red/orange in heat of summer! Clusters of thin tubular flowers about an inch long, resembling dangling fireworks, cover weeping light green lacey branches. A staple in many hummingbird gardens, it blooms both spring & fall migration seasons, with fall scouts due within the next week or two.

*Russelia* is a member of the Plantain Family (Plantaginaceae) which has nothing to do with bananas! It also is closely-related to the Figwort Family, where it formerly was placed, with snapdragons & Texas Sage.

Firecracker Plant works well potted or in the ground, thriving in full sun or partial shade. Mature landscape forms produce stems 3-5' in the air. Severe annual early spring pruning helps clean out dead branches & keeps plants shorter.

**You can't miss a hedge of Firecracker Plant on display as you drive in; with additional plants are found in the Hummingbird Garden.**



### SPINY HACKBERRY (*Celtis pallida*)

Spiny hackberry, also called Desert Hackberry, Chaparral & Grajeno, is one of the most common native shrubs in local brushland. Native to South Texas & Chihuahuan Desert, this extremely drought-tolerant shrub grows 8-20' tall, with a multi-stemmed trunk. It is not the same as the taller hackberry shade tree, found in some yards.

Spiny hackberry produces tiny yellow flowers after summer rains, followed by small edible orange berries, currently present. Fruit feeds a variety of birds & mammals including white-tailed deer which brows stems & foliage. It is also a larval host plant for American Snout butterfly (*Libytheana carinenta*), & is used as a nectar plant by other butterfly species when blooming. Spiny Hackberry trees actually are part of the Cannabaceae (Cannabis) Family along with hemp; but berries are non-halucinogenic.



These shrubby trees, rarely available in nurseries, commonly grow in poor soils, full sun or partial shade, as an understory shrub; are important for erosion control; & can be used as native "green screen" due to its dense growth & thorny branches.

**Find these native shrubs all along the Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Aug 14, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### PEACH MEXICAN OLEANDER (*Cascabela thevetia*)

Mexican Oleander is a shrub which can be pruned to a small tree, reaching 15'. It's not the traditional oleander (*Nerium oleander*) of the same plant family, Apocynaceae or dogbane family, which also includes Vinca, plumeria, and desert rose. Mexican Oleander grows in much of Mexico and Central America.

This plant commonly comes in either peach or yellow-flowering varieties with bell-shaped blossoms 2-3" long, blooming consistently May through October. Mexican oleander has bright green leaves 3-4" long and .25-.5" wide. Foliage grows quickly in moist soil with rapid growth weighing down branches, thus requiring pruning several times a year to maintain desired form.

Mexican Oleander is susceptible to heavy freezes, damaging foliage when temperatures dip into the mid to lower 20s, but not resulting in severe dieback. Larger specimens quickly recover and re-leaf.

Mexican Oleander also is known as "Lucky Nut" because of the large shiny seed inside the 1.5" green fruit. But this plant, like most in this family, is toxic due to cardiac glycosides in all plant parts.

**See Peach Mexican Oleander at rear entrance of the Gift Shop; and the yellow form in the Tropical Garden.**



### TEXAS LANTANA (*Lantana urticoides*)

Texas Lantana is a consistent summer bloomer, even during heat and drought! You'll see many lantana varieties in nurseries; but the true Texas native form is identified by clusters of small orange tubular blossoms. The native lantana originally carried the scientific name *Lantana horrida*, referring to pungent hairy stems and leaves often resulting in skin irritation. However, the species name changed in the 1990s to *urticoides* (like a nettle) due to its hairy nature.

The plant has an upright form commonly reaching 3-4' tall, but can appear larger with support from fences or nearby plants when young. Texas Lantana is deciduous, dropping leaves in cooler months, leaving bare stems in landscape.

Dark purple/black berries are a treat for birds, but toxic to most mammals including humans and cattle with pentacyclic triterpenoids most concentrated in un-ripened green berries. Bees use nectar for honey production. It also is a key nectar source for native and migratory butterflies; and also the larval plant for Hairstreak butterflies. Stems are very strong, bendable, used for basket weaving by pioneers.

Lantana is a member of the Verbena Family (Verbenaceae) along with verbenas, vervains, and Texas kidneywood a.k.a. beebush (*Aloysia gratissima*).



**See specimens in Butterfly, Hummingbird and Earthkind Gardens, and on Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of Aug 7, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### ALMOND VERBENA (*Alloysia virgate*)

Almond Verbena, an amazing summer-flowering plant, provides beneficial nectar for bees and butterflies during grueling heat. Its tiny white flowers also attract people searching for the source of an amazingly sweet fragrance!

A profusion of these flowers on 4-6" flower stalks are found all over this plant in 2-3 week bloom cycles through the year, often after rainy periods. But this Almond Verbena keeps blooming despite our drought!

Almond verbena is a large-growing shrub reaching 15', but can be trimmed into a hedge or small multi-trunk tree. The simple leaves of this plant are 3-4" long with sandpaper-like texture.

USDA classifies it Zone 8, surviving to 20 degrees for extended periods, thus found in butterfly gardens throughout much of Central Texas. Deciduous in much of the state, dropping leaves in winter, it keeps leaves during our mild winters if temperatures don't drop below freezing.

A woody member of the Verbena (Verbenaceae) Family, Almond Verbena is closely related to native Whitebrush or Texas Beebush (*Aloysia gratissima*), another great butterfly nectar plant; and was named "Florida Plant of the Year" in 2008 for consistent growth and profuse flowering.

**Look for Almond Verbena as a hedge in the Sensory Garden behind the stone benches; and in the Butterfly Garden approaching the Orchid Conservatory bridge.**

### PADRE ISLAND MISTFLOWER (*Conoclinium betonicifolium*)

Padre Island Mistflower, a.k.a. Betony-Leaf Mistflower elsewhere, is a low-growing native groundcover form with clusters of tiny light blue flowers creating a cloudlike appearance when seen in mass. A member of the Aster/Sunflower Family (Asteraceae), this plant is a butterfly magnet, flowering throughout the year, but particularly good for pollinators in late fall and winter.

This tough perennial mistflower form has a semi-succulent 1" elongated heart shape, resembling Texas Betony. Native to most Texas coastal areas, its thick waxy-coating makes it more durable than other mistflower varieties, handling wind and salt spray better than other *Conoclinium* species, an adaptation durable in sandy, island landscapes.

Sturdy nature of leaves and stems lets it keep growing during mild winters, unlike its Central Texas cousin, Gregg's mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*) that goes dormant freezing to ground level each year.

**See Padre Island Mistflower in the Butterfly Garden and Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden, likely with many monarch and queen butterflies nectaring--lots of fluttering life and video possibilities in the Gardens!**



## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 31, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### **FIREBUSH** (*Hamelia patens*)

Although this *Hamelia*, or Texas Firebush, often is sold as a Texas native, it is a “tropical” here! Originally native to deep Mexico, growing around pyramids of Veracruz and Yucatan, it now is found in much of subtropical Americas.

Firebush is a pollinator plant attracting both butterflies and hummingbirds with clusters of tubular golden-orange blossoms about 1” long and .25” across. Dark orange/red flower buds, providing color even when individual flowers aren’t open, are present most of the year except coldest months. Plants grow 6-8’ tall and 4-5’ across, but more compact dwarf and variegated varieties are now available. In fall, leaves turn from green to bronze tones, thus the “firebush” common name. In other areas, it may be called Scarletbush, Hummingbird Bush, or Redhead.



A tender tropical, Firebush freezes back if temperatures drop below 32°F, but quickly recovers in spring re-growing up to 6’ that summer. It is a member of the Madder Family (Rubiaceae) along with other ornamentals like Gardenias and Ixora.

Firebush was one of the first plants named a Texas Superstar, recognized by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service as a top performing plant in landscapes throughout the state.

**See striking examples of Firebush in Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardens.**

### **COMMON DAY FLOWER** (*Commelina erecta*)

Common Day Flower, or Spiderwort, is a summer wildflower blooming even in hot, sunny conditions. This resilient perennial, often thought a weed, can be used as native groundcover blooming nearly year-round, with a succulent underground tuber letting it store water and live through the winter.

The 3-petal flowers consist of 2 upper blue petals and a lower white “lip” petal resulting in another common name, White-mouth Dayflower. The slightly fuzzy green leaves resemble wide grass blades about 1” inch wide and several inches long. Common Day Flower is a vigorous grower, like other *Commelina* species. If growing where not wanted, it should be dug, removing central growing point from where branches radiate, attached to the fleshy, underground tuber.



Found in most of the continental U.S., particularly in the South, it is likely the most common member of the Spiderwort (*Commelinaceae*) Family which also includes Oyster Plant (*Rhoeo spathacea*), Purple Heart (*Tradescantia pallida*) and various trailing tropicals grown in hanging baskets with the umbrella name of “Wandering Jew.”

**See Day Flower along the nature trail, in Butterfly Garden, in front of Education Station, and occasionally in a few unwanted spots!**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 24, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'DIVINE' PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Divine')

Summer is prime plumeria bloom time. This week's featured exotic, plumeria 'Divine', definitely lives up to its name! Known for dense, compact growth and prolific blooming, it's a crowd favorite! Considered a dwarf by breeders at *Jungle Jack's Plumeria*, it can be maintained 4-5 feet tall; and is more cold tolerant than many varieties!

The fragrant, perfume-scented flowers have peach-colored centers, with pink-white blended petals--definitely a 'divine' combination.

Known as the Hawaiian Lei Flower, plumeria actually are indigenous to Tropical Americas including Brazil, Mexico and Caribbean Islands; and are members of the Dogbane Family (Apocynaceae), which also includes Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*), Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*), and annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*).



**See 'Divine' in the Plumeria "grove", along with about 90 other plumeria varieties, curated by the Plumeria Society of South Texas.**

### GOLD STAR ESPERANZA (*Tecoma stans* 'Gold Star')

Gold Star Esperanza, a.k.a. "Yellow Bells," currently is showing off its elegant yellow, bell-shaped tubular flowers, loved by both hummingbirds and butterflies, in landscapes throughout South Texas.

'Gold Star' Esperanza was a sport of the native yellow Esperanza found in Northern Mexico and West Texas, which have slightly smaller flowers, and thinner pointed leaves.

'Gold Star' typically grow 6-7' tall, but can be kept 3-5' with annual spring pruning. It prefers good drainage, but grows in clay or sandy soils. Plants will form bean-shaped seed pods which if removed promotes additional flowering. Esperanza are deciduous, going dormant and dropping leaves in winter; so need to be mixed with shrubs and perennials holding leaves to prevent a barren winter landscape.



'Gold Star' Esperanza was one of the first plants named a Texas Superstar by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for outstanding growth and flowering throughout the state. Living up to that title, it's prolifically flowering despite soaring summer temperatures and drought conditions.

**See 'Gold Star' Esperanza in the parking area, Butterfly Garden & House, plus Hummingbird and Earth-Kind Demonstration Gardens.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 10, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'ENCHANTED' PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Enchanted')

Plumeria are in full bloom at the Botanical Gardens! One beautiful variety which thrives in the summer heat is 'Enchanted' which definitely lives up to its name. It is an outstanding "rainbow" variety with distinct dark pink edges and showy yellow/orange streaks on large, thick petals which hold up well in the heat. Plants have a medium compact growth habit, good for our windy conditions.

Plumeria are members of the Dogbane Family (Apocynaceae) which also includes Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*), Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*), and annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*). July through September is peak plumeria bloom season here, as these plants thrive in hot, sunny conditions.



**See 'Enchanted' in the Plumeria Garden, curated by the Plumeria Society of South Texas. Be sure to attend its "Plumeria Passions" seminar at the Botanical Gardens, 9:30 am, Saturday, July 23; followed by its annual Plumeria Sale, at the Garden Senior Center, 5325 Greely, 10 am-1 pm, Saturday, July 30.**

### PAM'S PINK TURK'S CAP (*Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii* 'Pam's Pink')

Turk's Cap, in the Cotton/Hibiscus family (Malvaceae), is one of the best-known Texas natives! While usually seen in red, there are other variations, with 'Pam's Pink' a great performer in Texas landscapes. Though Red Turk's Cap is a Texas Superstar Plant with survival in garden trials throughout the state, the pink and white varieties are just as hardy.

Like the more common red form, Pam's Pink Turk's Cap has flowers 1-2 inches long emerging from branch tips, but petals never fully-open, look like rolled paper. Yellow pollen on fused stamen and protruding pistil are seen extending past the petals. Pollinated flowers produce 1-inch round green fruit turning red when ripe.



Turk's Cap is an understory plant frequently growing in light shade, but can grow in full sun, reaching 3-5 feet tall and about 3 feet wide. Growing best in well drained soils with organic matter, it can adapt to poorer soils.

It goes by several common names including Drummond Turk's Cap, Drummond's Wax Mallow, Red Mallow, Texas Mallow, Mexican Apple, Sleeping Hibiscus, Bleeding Hearts. A common Spanish name is Manzanita, or "little apple," referring to its small fruit.

Turks Cap is an excellent wildlife food source, including nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies. Its fruit reportedly has a faint apple taste and can be eaten cooked or raw, according to Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center ([www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)).

**See PinkTurk's Cap in the Earthkind Demonstration Garden.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 3, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### PRIDE OF BARBADOS (*Caesalpinia pulcherima*)

Pride of Barbados, (a.k.a. Peacock Flower), is a fast-growing tropical shrub with brilliant orange and yellow blossoms on flower spikes above fine-textured foliage. Extended stamen and pistils make a frilly look. Blossoms begin as yellow and orange, turning solid orange as they age in a couple of days. Pride of Barbados has compound leaves with many tiny leaflets on each individual leaf attached to main stems. The full leaf may be 6 inches wide and 12 or more inches long, but individual leaflets typically measure about a half inch. Give this plant space, as it frequently grows 8-12 feet tall once established. It is a nectar plant for both hummingbirds and butterflies.



A spectacular specimen plant in summer, it is deciduous, leaving barren branches in winter. Locating it near plants holding their leaves in winter is recommended to keep the landscape full in cold months. Spring regrowth is slow, with leaves usually reappearing mid-April. Native to West Indies and Tropical Americas, Pride of Barbados will freeze back to the ground in cold winters, coming back from the base here, considered root hardy to Zone 8 in Central Texas. It is a member of the Pea/Legume Family (Fabaceae) along with native mesquite trees. Producing flattened seed pods after flowering, removing seeds helps extend its bloom cycle.

**Pride of Barbados greets guests in the parking lot, but also is found on Butterfly Hill, Hummingbird and Earthkind Gardens. Superior performance statewide earned it Texas Superstar designation by Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service.**

### GRAY SHRUB SAGE (*Salvia chamaedryoides*)

Native to Mexico and grown in much of South and West Texas, Gray Shrub Sage, or Blue Germander Sage, is a short, mounding perennial shrub with small pale gray-green leaves. It's a member of the Mint Family (Lamiaceae) along with other salvias plus many herbs and coleus. Designated a USDA Zone 8 plant, it is freeze-hardy down to 10°F, easily surviving coldest Coastal Bend temperatures; and has survived much colder winters as far north as Amarillo. It is used frequently as a border or companion plant in arid gardens, thriving in full sun or partial shade, with good drainage.



Once established, it requires minimal care to maintain its mounding 2-foot wide and similar maximum height. Although not be a prolific bloomer that knocks your socks off at first sight, it does have tiny, true dark blue flowers less than an inch wide, with a distinct double lobed lip on the bottom petal of the small tubular flower. Heaviest blooming is during milder spring and fall seasons, with intermittent blooms throughout summer. Each flower stalk may have 1 or several individual flowers open at any time as nectar sources for butterflies and hummingbirds in arid regions.

**See Gray Shrub Sage in full bloom in the Earthkind Garden, as a companion plant to our display of ornamental grasses.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 26, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### **PAGODA PLANT** (*Clerodendrum paniculatum*)

Pagoda Plant is an easy tropical known for its impressive orange flower-layered stalk often reaching a foot tall, lending it the common name Pagoda Plant. It also is called Bagflower or Glory Bower in other regions. Native to tropical areas of Asia including China & the Philippines, it is a member of the Mint Family (Lamiaceae) along with coleus, sages, & many herbs.

Here, Pagoda Plant usually grows 5-7 feet tall at maturity. Its large simple green leaves begin small near the branch base, but near flowers can be up to 12 inches across--an elegant serene backdrop for towering stalks of layered, orange clustering flowers. Single blossoms are less than an inch across, but extend several inches from the main stalk, creating a long tubular flower. Blossoms opening first at the bottom of the stalk, newer blossoms near the top, give a layered, row effect. Plants bloom on new growth; and the plant can produce new stems throughout the year, blooming multiple times late Spring until frost. The plant spreads from underground stems with little branching above ground.



Pagoda plant is tropical, so freezes back; but was root-hardy in our severe 2021 freeze, quickly blooming again that summer while many tropicals never recovered. It also is a good hummingbird attractor with its large number of long-lasting tubular orange blossoms.

[See our impressive Pagoda Plant in the Tropical Garden.](#)

### **INLAND SEA OATS** (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)

Inland Sea Oats is a great native ornamental grass underused in local landscapes! Known for its low, spreading growth, it has flat pale green flower 'spikelets' which blow in the wind on arching stems hanging above green bamboo-like leaves. Leaves may turn pale green in sunny locations, and have been noted to turn a bright yellow-gold in fall.

This ornamental grass grows only 2-4 feet tall in clumps. As a perennial, it comes back yearly, but spring pruning encourages new fresh growth. It is a great option for low-maintenance shady areas, providing height and line element to landscape design. Seed heads also are used in floral arrangements.

A member of the Grass Family (Poaceae), Inland Sea Oats is native to most of the continental United States. Common names in other areas include Indian Wood Oats, Wild Oats, River Oats, Flathead Oats, Upland Oats, Upland Sea Oats.



[See Inland Sea Oats in the Earthkind Demonstration Garden along with other ornamental grasses and hardy plants for our region.](#)

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 19, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### DINNER PLATE HIBISCUS (*Hibiscus moscheutos*)

Dinner Plate Hibiscus is a cold-hardy, herbaceous, flowering perennial known for giant, show-stopping blooms! Other common names include Swamp Rose Mallow, Crimson-eyed Rose Mallow & Eastern Rose Mallow. Herbaceous green stems sprout from the ground late spring, quickly creating a small rounded shrub. Often considered an heirloom plant with its popularity in early to mid-1900s from southern to mid-Atlantic states & much of the Midwest, its popularity declined after fancy Tropical Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) became more abundant. But interest in hardy perennial plants has breeders introducing a new generation to these old garden favorites.



Eye-catching flowers are multiple 5-petal blossoms up to 6 inches across on large plants, in a variety of shades from white to dark red, & shades of pink and purple. This hibiscus can grow 4-6' tall & 3-4' wide with fast-growing tender green stems turning light gray-brown at the base as they mature. Its tender perennial nature means it drops leaves in fall & stems freeze back in winter, re-sprouting from the base each spring, quickly flowering all summer long. Classified as a Zone 6 plant by USDA, it is root hardy down to -10°F easily surviving our mild winters.

Dinner Plate Hibiscus is a close relative of the swamp mallow, a.k.a. Texas Star Hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*). Its fast-growing nature produces weak stems that break in high winds, but new growth quickly emerges. They can be grown in large pots if regularly fertilized & watered, but do best planted in landscapes, blossoming more. These mallows also are larval plants for multiple butterfly species--common checkered skipper, gray hairstreak, IO moth, & pearly wood nymph.

**See Dinner Plate Hibiscus in the Butterfly House.**

### WILD OLIVE (*Cordia boissieri*)

Wild Olive is a great native, summer-flowering tree for South Texas! Often called Mexican Olive, Texas Olive & Anacahuita, it naturally grows in deep South Texas & Mexico; also found in landscapes up to Central Texas, with hard freezes limiting expansion further north. Wild Olive is a water-wise plant needing good drainage. Standing water quickly kills the root system.

Wild Olive can flower nearly all year, even summer, with clusters of 1.5-2" deep-throated white blossoms & yellow centers. Blossoms have high nectar content--a great hummingbird attractor.



Pollinated flowers become opaque pale green fruit resembling an olive, technically edible, but not very palatable! The common name "olive" is a visual observation, with this tree in a completely different family (Boraginaceae) than the common edible olives (*Olea europaea*).

This small ornamental tree has 4 by 6" green leaves with a coarse medium-to-dark green top; & lighter gray-green undersides, with small "hairs" giving a smooth soft texture underneath. The tree is noted for its unusually coarse, stringy gray-brown bark. Wild Olives frequently grow 12-15' tall, & 15-20' wide, but can grow taller based on water availability. This tree produces dense shade, sometimes limiting grass growth beneath if near other trees.

Finding large specimen trees often is difficult at nurseries; but a 4-5' tree grows rapidly in its second & third year, once roots expand.

**See blooming Wild Olives in the Sensory & Hummingbird Gardens.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 12, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'CARDINAL' PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Cardinal')

Plumeria always are favorite flowers for semi-tropical areas, already in strong bloom here! Plumeria are in the Apocynaceae Family, which also includes Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*), Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*) and annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*).

In the Coastal Bend, July through September is peak plumeria blooming season as these plants thrive in hot, sunny conditions. Dark red plumeria blossoms seem to attract guests' special attention; and 'Cardinal' has been a good early bloomer with an abundance of rich, dark red/maroon blossoms each about 2 inches across. This variety has narrow petals; but the number of open blooms makes up for the dainty blossom appearance. The plant is considered semi-compact, so doesn't grow as quickly or gangly as other varieties, making it a great option for a large potted specimen.



**Admire Cardinal now in the Plumeria Garden, since early warm weather has the plumeria collection already putting on a stunning show. Take the ramp up to the Willoughby Viewing Platform to see and photograph blooms from all angles!**

### GIANT CONEFLOWER (*Rudbeckia maxima*)

Giant Coneflower is an East/Northeast Texas native now making an impressive flower show. It naturally grows in sunny, open areas with rich moist soil not only in East Texas, but stretching into Eastern Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

Impressive flower stalks stand 3-5 feet tall with multiple blossoms on each, providing a colorful addition standing above other annuals and perennials. A single row of bright yellow petals 2-3 inches long and .5-.75 inches wide dangle from the large center "cone" standing 1.5-2.5 inches above the base of the flower, changing from yellow to brown as the flowers open and are spent. By the middle to end of bloom cycle, it is mostly brown, attracting pollinators and humans alike. Like other Ray Flowers, the center has the true flower components containing pollen and nectar, with a closer look showing tiny flower parts opening over several weeks. Impressive grey-green foliage can be a foot long and 4-6 inches wide, leaves creating a rosette near the ground, resulting in the common name, Cabbage Coneflower.



It also is called Great Coneflower, or Giant Brown-eyed Susan in other regions, being in the same genus as smaller *Rudbeckia* species, commonly known collectively as either Black-eyed or Brown-eyed Susan.

**Giant Coneflower currently is blooming in the Butterfly Garden. It can be cut from a perennial garden for floral arrangements!**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 5, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### 'HOMESTEAD PURPLE' VERBENA (*Verbena canadensis* 'Homestead Purple')

'Homestead Purple' is one of the most consistent verbena varieties in Texas landscapes, with umbrella-like clusters of dark purple blossoms from spring through early fall if regularly fertilized. Individual petals have a double-lip tip instead of a point, often called "star-shaped."

Plants stay 8-12 inches tall with a trailing growth pattern--good for colorful groundcover or hanging baskets. Its small hairy leaves with serrated edges remain dark green during the growing season. Powdery mildew resistance helps these plants thrive when other verbena struggle in summer. In mild winters, Homestead Purple verbena can survive as a tender perennial in Zone 8B; but mostly is used as an annual, replanted each year for rapid re-growth and strong bloom.



Homestead Purple was developed in South Florida, on the market for decades due to outstanding performance. Verbena (a.k.a. vervain) are part of their own plant family *Verbenaceae*, which includes native verbena and lantana.

**See Homestead Purple Verbena in front of Education Station, and in the Butterfly Garden.**

### WESTERN SOAPBERRY TREE (*Sapindus saponaria* var. *drummondii*)

Western Soapberry is a native tree rarely found in landscapes. A member of the Soapberry (*Sapindaceae*) Family, it may be called just Soapberry, or other common names Wild China Tree, Wild Chinaberry, Indian Soap Plant and Jaboncillo in other regions. Western Soapberry is native to Mexico north to Kansas and southwest Missouri; and from New Mexico east to Louisiana, found along stream banks, rocky hillsides and forest margins.

Spikes of small creamy white flowers appear in tree tops May-June, maturing into small half-inch berries after fertilization, starting almost translucent pale green, turning light orange at maturity. Western Soapberry has compound light-medium green leaves 12-18 inches long, with up to 24 paired leaflets each 1-2 inches long, providing rare fall color in South Texas, as deciduous shade trees prepare to drop leaves for winter.



Trees may reach 10-50 feet with 20-30 foot-wide canopies, growing larger in deep moist soils. Rarely found in local nurseries, Soapberries grow quickly from seeds. Seeds are toxic to humans due to the alkaloid saponin, used as a soap substitute for washing clothes.

**See a nice Western Soapberry specimen in the Sensory Garden.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 29, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### **BROGA TIGER ORCHID** (*Grammatophyllum 'Broga Tiger'*)

*Grammatophyllum 'Broga Tiger'* was hybridized by Serdang Orchid Nursery in Malaysia in 2009, by crossing *G. measuresianum* X *G. 'Tiger's Paw.'* It's known for its spectacular inflorescences often 3 feet long, blooming for up to 3 months, due to the large number of smaller fragrant flowers. Individual flowers are .75 to 1 inch across, with gold and bronze striping resembling tiger stripes!

'Broga Tiger' Orchid is an impressive specimen with the plant itself nearly 3 feet tall and wide. *Grammatophyllum* orchids are known as the "Queen of Orchids" because of its enormity. Fast-growing plants have broad leaves about 3 inches wide and 18-24 inches long, having been compared to sugar cane leaves, thus another common name, "Sugar Cane orchids."



**Visit the Orchid Conservatory to see our Broga Tiger, donated to the Botanical Gardens by local orchid aficionado Richard Schmidt, wanting other orchid lovers to enjoy this spectacular plant!**

### **SEA OXEYE DAISY** (*Borrichia frutescens*)

Sea Oxeye Daisy is one of the most common flowers found in wetlands, its presence often used as a wetland indicator. Tolerant of a variety of poor soil types including extremely salty/brackish sands and clay, this plant grows in extremes, surviving flooding with poor drainage, as well as being extremely drought tolerant. Sea Ox-eye Daisy is found in coastal areas from Maryland to Texas, down into Mexico.

Sea Oxeye Daisy grows primarily upright usually 2-3 feet tall, but reportedly up to 6 feet. Bright yellow daisy flowers about 2-2.5 inches across appear beginning in May through most of summer. The gray-green simple thick leaves with smooth edges are easily recognized, becoming more succulent as leaves age, making them more adaptable for harsh conditions.

An important nectar source for bees and butterflies, after maturing, seeds are eaten by granivorous birds. Its perennial nature provides cover for small wetland animals.

The common name "ox-eye" comes from its large center which turns dark brown as it matures, remaining in its dark dry form after flowering with a prickly texture. It is a member of the Sunflower/Aster Family (Asteraceae), with other common names in other areas, like Bushy Seaside Tansy and Sea Daisy.



**Sea Ox-Eye Daisy is blooming along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail, and along edges of wetland areas.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 22, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or try in your landscape!

### **GREEN GLOBE ARTICHOKE** (*Cynara scolymus* 'Green Globe')

Green Globe Artichoke is a vegetable gaining popularity as an ornamental in recent years. Artichokes are members of the Daisy/Sunflower Family (Asteraceae) which includes more than 32,000 species and 1,800 known genera.

The artichokes we eat are actually flower buds harvested before they open! Edible flower buds can be 4-5 inches across, but if allowed to mature, and the flower opens, bluish-purple petals appear producing a giant thistle-type flower great for flower arrangements!

Even before flower buds form, the plant makes a statement in any garden with large, gray, highly-serrated leaves 12-24 inches long. Plants can reach 3-4 feet wide and tall. The plant is perennial, able to live multiple years; but often is replanted each winter/early spring adding freshness to the landscape and single-stem, uniform look to each specimen.



**See Globe Artichokes currently blooming in the Sensory Garden, lending an artistic backdrop to one of late artist Danny O'Dowdy's hand-carved limestone sofas, covered with mosaic tile sarapes.**

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**Sea Ox-Eye Daisy is blooming along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail, and along edges of wetland areas.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 15, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### PLUMERIA 'LAVA FLOW'

(*Plumeria rubra* 'Lava Flow')

Plumeria are favorite flowers for semi-tropical areas like ours. 'Lava Flow' is one of the first in our 90-plant Plumeria collection varieties in full bloom, after winter storage!

Believed to be a seedling from variety 'Gloria Schmidt,' 'Lava Flow' has large, full heads with many blossoms, each having a strong rose scent. Individual flowers are about 3 inches around, with bright pink, rounded petal edges and yellow-orange centers. The eye has reddish-orange lava colors flowing onto a peach-colored petal. The back is streaked with a red-orange stripe.



Plants are moderate growers, adding 12-24 inches of compact growth in a growing season. Plumeria need full sun and well-drained soil. They can be grown in pots, but need regular fertilization. If planted in the ground, they should be removed and stored inside during the winter; or protected from winter winds on the south side of a structure.

**See 'Lava Flow' in the Plumeria Garden, maintained by the Plumeria Society of South Texas. "The Grove" is in full bloom during summer months. Highly freeze sensitive, in November, the Society strips leaves and removes plants from the ground to store bareroot in greenhouses through early March.**

### RETAMA (*Parkinsonia aculeate*)

Retama, a small native tree known for its vibrant green trunk and long thin leaves, provides dappled shade for plants below. The city adopted it as one of the trees of Corpus Christi on October 2, 1957. Common names in other regions include Mexican Paloverde and Jerusalem Thorn. Retama is a member of the legume family (Fabaceae) along with mesquite, peas, and common green beans. Pollinated flowers result in bean pods hanging from the branches.



Retama blooms profusely from late spring through fall with mildly-fragrant, delicate yellow blossoms about 3/4 -inch across, with hints of red/orange at the throat. Its compound leaves often are more than 12 inches long with a central axis and .25-inch-long leaflets on each side. These small leaflets result in the light shade below.

This drought-tolerant, fast, easy-to-grow tree quickly can reach 15-20 feet tall and 12-15 feet wide. However, its rapid growth produces weak wood that frequently breaks in high winds, making it marginal for urban landscapes. Working much better in rural areas, it often grows wild along drainage ditches showing its versatility to withstand dry or wet conditions, and wide range of soil conditions.

**See Retama along the Brennecke Nature Trail, easy to spot with bright green leaves and yellow flowers.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 8, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### MEXICAN SHAVING BRUSH TREE (*Pseudobombax elipiticum*)

Mexican Shaving Brush is a tropical tree native to Southern Mexico and Central America, known for its thick green trunk and unusual flowers--primarily 4-inch stamen resembling an old-fashioned man's shaving brush! The botanical terms "pseudo" and "bombax" come from Greek words for "false" and "cotton," referring to the large flower.

Flowers most often are white; while red/pink are seen in other regions. Technically in the Mallow Family (Malvaceae), Shaving Brush Tree is a very distant cousin of Hibiscus, botanically classified in the subfamily Bombaxaceae. Large compound palmate leaves up to a foot across with five leaflets give the appearance of large fat fingers. The unusual trunk, large leaves and unique frilly flowers have resulted in a common name of "Dr. Seuss Tree" in some areas due to its whimsical appearance.



It can grow to 60 feet with trunk up to 4 feet in diameter in native habitats of Central America. Here, it usually stays under 20 feet with much smaller trunks. The plant is deciduous, dropping leaves in winter and typically blossoming before leaves appear late in spring with multiple "shaving brush" flowers showing on bare stems. Established plants can tolerate short durations in upper 20s; extended periods of colder weather can cause freeze damage. Plants can be grown in large pots, but flower less frequently.

Central American cultures use the flowers to make an intoxicating drink.

**See our largest Mexican Shaving Brush Tree behind the Visitor Center near the outdoor aquatic turtle exhibit: and a smaller one in the Tropical Garden.**

### DAHLBERG DAISY (*Thymophylla tenuiloba*)

Dahlberg Daisy also goes by other common names including *Dyssodia*, *Golden Fleece*, *Bristleleaf*, *Dogwood*, and *Prickly Leaf*. It is a member of the Aster/Sunflower Family (Asteraceae) making it a cousin of many common ray flowers like daisies, zinnias, and sunflowers. Native to Texas and Mexico, *Thymophylla* species also have naturalized in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.

Dahlberg Daisy is one native often available in Garden Centers in the bedding plant section due to its small size. It prefers sandy or well-drained soil and is drought tolerant, especially reseeded volunteers from previous plantings.



Plants typically grow 6-12 inches tall with small bright yellow daisy flowers, about .5 inches in diameter. It's highly-serrated leaves give a light frilly appearance. It blooms profusely throughout spring and summer, usually dying out before winter. It does reseed with smaller plants appearing next year nearby on edges of flowerbeds. It likes well-drained soil, with minimal cultivation. Its small golden daisy flowers attract butterflies and bees, even in arid regions where this plant grows. All parts of the Dahlberg Daisy plant are toxic if ingested in sufficient quantities.

**See Dahlberg Daisy in the Butterfly Garden. Seedlings sometimes are found in Arid Garden and on walkway edges in Plumeria Garden where it reseeded last year.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 1, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### ELIZABETH TAYLOR HYBRID TEA ROSE (*Rosa hybrida* 'Elizabeth Taylor')

'Elizabeth Taylor' is an elegant flowering hybrid tea rose developed by Weeks Roses. It's shapely buds and showy blossoms with shocking hot pink petals, smoky edges and a slightly spicy fragrance definitely reflect the personality of its namesake! Medium to large double blossoms have 30-35 petals, creating a full appearance when open and are long-lived compared to other fragile varieties. Moderate temperatures produce larger and more prolific blossoms.

Elizabeth Taylor is a cross between hybrid tea varieties "First Prize" and "Swarthmore" by rosarian Von C. Weddle in 1985, introduced to the market in 1986 by Jackson & Perkins. The bush grows to a medium height up to 5-6 feet, with large, glossy green dense foliage.



**See a new planting of 6 'Elizabeth Taylor' in raised beds of the Rose Garden. April and May is the prime bloom season for roses in South Texas, with fewer blossoms present during summer heat.**

### PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS (*Opuntia phaeacantha* Engelman)

Prickly Pear, a common South Texas cactus, blooms with yellow or peach-colored flowers opening as early as March, blooming through mid-May; but this year in our area, a little later than usual.

Each flower is attached to an oval green structure--the flower's ovary--located between the main blossom and cactus pad. Once the flower is pollinated by bees, butterflies, or other insects, the ovary eventually matures, developing into a dark purple fruit or "pear." A single pad may have multiple fruit around its edge, creating an impressive display as they ripen mid to late summer. Ripe "pears" can be harvested and eaten fresh or used in jams and jellies. Although they are sweet on the inside, they are protected by tiny thorns found on the outside of the fruit, so beware when picking and eating.

Prickly Pear is one of the easiest cacti to grow. The familiar round pads are specialized water-storing stems, a favorite food for javelina. Pads easily root if the bottom edges are planted several inches into well-drained soil. After rooting, additional pads will form on the edges, with plants growing 6-8 feet tall, and 5-7 feet wide over time. The oldest pads often turn from green to thick grayish brown trunk, allowing the cactus to easily grow taller and be used as "natural" fencing.



**See Prickly Pear in the Arid Garden, along part of our entry fence on S. Staples Street, and on the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of April 24, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### COCONUT ORCHID (*Maxillariella tenuifolia*)

*Maxillaria tenuifolia* is called the **Coconut Orchid** due to a distinct coconut scent of the maroon petals, and white with maroon-spotted lip blossoms less than an inch across. Each flower spike typically has 10-12 blossoms, with a plant easily having 50-60 blooms each cycle. The grass-like foliage stays fairly compact, and is a good potted plant even not in bloom. It does need good drainage with orchid bark or similar medium to prevent rotting.

This species was discovered near Veracruz, Mexico, by Karl Theodore Hartweg and described by Lindley in 1837 in the *Botanical Register*. It naturally grows from Mexico to Costa Rica at elevations up to 5000 feet.

**See (and smell) Coconut Orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**



### LAZY DAISY (*Aphanostephus riddellii*)

Lazy Daisy, a member of the Aster or Sunflower Family (*Asteraceae*), is a low-growing Texas native wildflower found in abundance throughout much of the Coastal Bend in well-drained sandy and loam soils, and in prairies from the Texas Panhandle down to Corpus Christi.

Small individual white daisy flowers, with narrow white petals and bright yellow centers, are found in clusters. Flowers often do not open until afternoon, thus the "lazy" moniker. A good nectar source for butterflies, blooming from March-June, these perennials come back year after year, hugging the ground typically 5-8 inches tall. It also is called *Riddel's Lozedaisy* in some guides.

**See the largest patch in our Arid Garden, or also sporadically in the field between the playground and Arid Garden, and on Oso Ridge on the far side of our boardwalk.**



## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of April 17, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **JULIA CHILD FLORIBUNDA ROSE** (*Rosa hybrida* 'Julia Child')

'Julia Child', a prolific-flowering bright yellow floribunda rose, is one of the best-performing roses in the Coastal Bend! Its "butter gold" blooms open to 3.5 inches across, each with more than 35 petals, a high number in rosarian circles, creating a dense blossom. Like other floribundas, 3-5 blossoms are common on each stem.

This floribunda grows 3-4 feet tall with glossy green foliage and rounded, bushy growth habit. Heavy pruning late February is recommended to promote new growth; and light September pruning helps produce more fall blossoms. Here, roses typically start blooming steadily in early April after spring pruning, until summer heat produces dormancy in most roses. Cooler fall temperatures provide a second blooming cycle in South Texas.

'Julia Child', introduced in 2006 by Weeks Roses, and breeder Tom Caruth, also has been used as a parent to other crosses due to excellent performance. The same year, it was an All-American Rose Selection (AARS) Winner, an annual award bestowed upon roses which outperform all others in American gardens and vases.

**Admire multiple groupings of 'Julia Child' blooming in the Rose Gardens' raised beds.**



### **PLAINS COREOPSIS** (*Coreopsis tinctorial*)

'Plains Coreopsis', 'Golden Wave', 'Calliopsis' or 'Golden Tickseed' is an golden-yellow annual typically growing 1-2 feet tall, with narrow, compound green leaves closer to the ground, and flowers extending well above foliage. Although these plants can bloom February-December here, most prolific flowering is spring. Varieties of this showy annual naturally are found throughout central U.S. plains into Canada, and have naturalized in most other states.

Plains Coreopsis commonly is seen in low-lying damp areas of prairies, swales and ditches; and is particularly showy in large patches when the golden flowers move in the wind, resulting in the Golden Wave common name.

Like other members of the Aster/Sunflower Family (*Asteraceae*), individual blossoms we see are ray flowers, technically the smaller true flowers in the center portion. This design is beneficial to nectaring butterflies, also providing pollen for bees. Although local coreopsis blossoms primarily are yellow, variations in other regions have visible maroon coloration near the flower center.

**See Plains Coreopsis in many naturalized areas at the Botanical Gardens including around Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden, ditches near our parking lot, and throughout Brennecke Nature Trail areas.**



## BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of March 20, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### GOLDEN SHRUB DAISY (*Euryops pectinatus*)

Golden Shrub Daisy a.k.a. African Bush Daisy, like other daisy flowers, is a member of the Daisy/Aster Family *Asteraceae*, sporting a ray-flower--a composite of many tiny flowers in blossom center. These forms are quite attractive to butterflies which use the center as a landing site, while extracting nectar from multiple open flowers in the center of the inflorescence, surrounded by a single row of lemon-yellow petals to attract pollinators. The overall blossom is 2-2.5 inches across.

While plants reach 4 feet tall and wide in other regions, they stay shorter and more compact here, frequently 2-3 feet tall and wide. More compact growth is likely due to less natural rainfall and summer water stress. Dark green, highly serrated leaves along semi-woody stems provide a dramatic backdrop for yellow blossoms.

A prolific cool weather bloomer, particularly spring, Golden Shrub Daisy grows best in pots, but also can be planted in landscapes. It will decline in sunny high summer temperatures, with edges of leaves drying out, some branch dieback, and limited flowering. But potted specimens can be moved to sunny locations in cooler months to promote flowering, then protected in semi-shade during summer until cooler temperatures return. Plants grow best in humus-rich, well-drained soil. Regular fertilization promotes leaves and additional flowers.

**See Golden Shrub Daisy in the Butterfly House.**



### TEXAS VERVAIN (*Verbena halei*)

Texas Vervain is one of the earliest native wildflowers to bloom along Texas hillsides, blooming from March through June in much of the southern U.S. from NC down to FL, and as far west as AZ and up to MO. This plant has slender flower stalks usually 12-18 inches tall, standing above other wildflowers. Plants may have multiple flower stalks, each featuring small 5-petal lavender/blue blossoms with 4-5 open on each flower stalk simultaneously, lowest on the stalk opening first.

Delicate flowers on thin stalks dance in the wind, resulting in other common names like Slender Verbena, Texas Verbena and Slender Vervain. It is a member of the Verbena Family (*Verbenaceae*) along with lantana (*Lantana* sp.), frog fruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) and Vitex or Chaste Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*), besides traditional trailing verbena varieties.

Texas Vervain is an important nectar source for butterflies; and considered deer resistant. Leaves are edible often used in salads, with delicate flowers as garnish.



**See Texas Vervain blooming in patches along edges of the Brennecke Nature Trail, and in larger natural grassland areas, between the playground and Arid Garden, and Oso Creek Loop Trial.**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of March 13, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **DARK PURPLE DENDROBIUM ORCHID** (*Dendrobium atropurpurea*)

This small-growing dendrobium orchid species was first identified in 1859, naturally found in Myanmar, Malaysia, Java, the Moluccas, Sulawesi and New Guinea. Like many orchids, it is epiphytic, clinging to trees and rocks, needing no soil. London's Kew Gardens now recognizes it as *Oxystophyllum atropurpureum*. This form is considered a species, occurring in nature while many other cultivated orchids are hybrids being bred for flower colors, size, and longevity.

It is much smaller and more compact than traditional Dendrobiums, usually known for their height with long stems and cascading flower stalks. This species grows with individual pseudobulbs to only about 10 inches tall, and leaves 1.5-2.5 inches wide. Some early collectors referred to it as a "pygmy" form.

The creamy, slightly ruffled-edged petals have stunning purple blotches, with a very tubular lower lip petal with dark stripes--variations making it stand out in a collection of mostly solid dendrobium flowers. Flower stalks have 1-5 blossoms, and are short-lived compared to other Dendrobiums.

**See this unusual species in the rear section of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory along with a plethora of other orchids currently starting their spring bloom cycle.**



### **AGARITA OR WILD CURRANT** (*Mahonia trifoliolata*)

During the next few weeks, Agarita, or Wild Currant, is in full bloom in South Texas brushland. While Agarita can bloom sporadically in late spring, this early bloom cycle definitely is the most striking. This shrub can grow 3-8 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide, native to South Texas, stretching west to Arizona and in Northern Mexico.

Known for its gray-green, multi-pointed, trifoliate leaves resembling Christmas holly, flowers are the showstoppers this time of year with clusters of vibrant golden cup-shaped blossoms visible when most surrounding native plants are dormant.

After pollination, mature flowers produce clusters of red berries eaten by birds and wildlife; and can be harvested for jam, jelly or wine. Quail and small mammals seek cover in the prickly-leaved plant. Pioneers used its roots as a yellow dye source.

This member of the Barberry Family, (*Berberidaceae*) has a wide range of common names and spellings depending on location, including Agarito, Algerita, Laredo Mahonia, Laredo Oregon-grape and Trifoliate Barberry. Unlike many native plants, it can be found at private retail garden centers.

**See Agarita naturally growing in many areas along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.**



## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of March 6, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **FANTASIA SHOCKING PINK ZONAL GERANIUM**

(*Pelargonium x hortorum* 'Fantasia Shocking Pink')

Zonal Geraniums are among Texas spring flower favorites; and Fantasia 'Shocking Pink' is one of the most vibrant! While they are fairly heat-tolerant, most gardeners use them as spring color in pots until early summer. *Fantasia* series creates uniform mounding plants about 12 inches high and wide. Flower stalks rise above foliage with 3-4-inch round clusters of showy blossoms lasting 1-2 weeks. Dead-heading (removing old blossoms) will promote new flower stalks during the season. Flowers attract bees and hummingbirds.

Rounded leaves on long petioles are fragrant and provide a nice backdrop for colorful flowers. Plants grow best in large pots or hanging baskets for better control of water & less disease from soil splashing on lower leaves. Geraniums are heavy feeders, doing best if fertilized every 1-2 weeks while blooming. Zonal geraniums are striking, but susceptible to fungal & bacterial problems causing premature leaf drop if not quickly addressed. Remove dying or yellowing leaves during weekly deadheading to keep in top form.



**See large pots of Fantasia Shocking Pink in front of Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, and in Butterfly House.**

### **BLACKBRUSH ACACIA** (*Vachellia rigidula*)

Blackbrush Acacia is a large shrub/small tree found in South Texas Thornscrub Chaparral from Rio Grande Plains up to Austin, hugging the Mexican border stretching from Corpus Christi west to Big Bend. Common names include *Blackbrush*, *Chaparro Prieto*, and *Gavia*. This shrubby tree is a member of the Bean Family (*Fabaceae*) along with native woody cousins: Mesquite, Ebony, Huisache, & Retama. It was formerly classified in genus *Acacia* with older literature using scientific names *Acacia amentacea* and *Acacia rigidula*. It is very drought-tolerant & a good Xeriscape shrub, easily incorporated into arid landscapes & rock gardens, but rarely found in nurseries.

Blackbrush is one of the first South Texas spring bloomers, with numerous 2-inch spikes of pale yellow frilly flowers 1-2 inches long, often appearing on bare branches before the spring flush of leaves. It has spiny stiff branches growing 4-12 feet tall creating a dense thicket. The white/gray bark contrasts with the tiny dark green compound leaves. Stems are covered in short thick thorns providing protection from browsing mammals. Pollinated flowers result in small brown beans forming later in spring. Blackbrush is an early pollen source for bees. Butterflies nectar on flowers, and granivorous birds feed on dropped seeds.



**Find Blackbrush Acacia along the Brennecke Nature Trail, with greatest population near the Palapa Grande & behind the Arid Garden.**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of February 27, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **MEXICAN LAELIA ORCHID** (*Laelia anceps*)

Mexican Laellia species is native to orchids of Mexico's eastern mountain range, Sierra Madre Oriental. It first was described in 1835 by John Lindley in the *Botanical Register*. This epiphytic orchid, requiring no soil, has striking purple blossoms with pink/gold variations in its throat. Originating in mid-mountain elevations, they are hardier than many other orchids surviving a wide range of growing temperatures from 100°F down to upper 20s, but risky!

With brilliant colors and durability, Laelias have been used in hybridizing, therefore are referred to in parentage of species crosses, particularly Cattleya species, producing new genus name, *Laeliocattleya*!



**See *Laelia anceps* in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory. Other orchids blooming now include phalaenopsis, paphiopedilums, and dendrobiums. Visit often to see these and other spring blooming orchids as spring sunshine and moderately warm temperatures bring more orchids into bloom a little early.**

### **TANGLEWOOD, aka Desert Olive** (*Forestiera pubescens*)

If you walk through South Texas Brushlands in February or early March, smelling a sweet aroma when nothing appears to be blooming, you may be smelling Tanglewood! One of the first bloomers to signal spring, its tiny flowers, only .25 inch across without obvious petals, opening along leafless branches, are easy to miss. Some people call it *Spring Herald* or *Spring Goldenglow* because the flowers appear very early in spring, ahead of most other communal plants. It also is called *Elbowbush* or *Devi's Elbow* due to the 90° angle of new branches to the original stem.



Tanglewood is a common spineless understory plant in the South Texas Chaparral Thornscrub. This member of the olive family (*Oleaceae*) goes by multiple common names including Desert Olive and Strechberry, Chaparral, and Downy Forestiera. The most readily-used common name here is Tanglewood, coming from rapidly-growing branches that form trees and shrubs creating a "tangled" effect.

This plant is dioecious, having male and female flowers on different plants. Male flowers have clusters of bright yellow stamens in a starburst effect. Female flowers are fragrant recognizable by the reddish round-ended pistils creating a similar starburst effect. They readily attract bees and butterflies that are needed for pollinating the separated male and female plants.

After the miniscule flowers are pollinated, small blue-black fruit appear, which are eaten by birds and small mammals. The rest of the year, Tanglewood appears as a dense shrub that can grow 10-plus feet tall with dark green oval leaves about ¾ inch long. It makes a good drought-tolerant screen.

**On the Brennecke Nature Trail, follow your nose, carefully inspecting plants, to locate Tanglewood!**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of February 13, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **SNAPDRAGON–SONNET MIX** (*Antirrhinum majus*)

Snapdragon gets its name from tubular flowers which resemble a dragon head, and when squeezed from the side, “snap” open revealing its mouth! In lore and “flower language” surrounding old world cut flowers, snapdragons have 2 meanings, representing both graciousness and deception, possibly due to the concealed “mouth.”

*Sonnet* is a group of medium-sized snapdragons usually growing 16-24 inches tall when flowering. Flowers appear on linear stalks opening from the bottom, with stalks blooming for months during cool seasons, and flower stalks suitable as cut flowers. Flowers are about 1-inch across with wide petals creating a full stalk of color and mild fragrance. The flower throat is typically golden-yellow with speckles near the edge. Snapdragon colors include reds, maroon, pink, white and yellow. They are a nectar source for butterflies and hummingbirds.



Snapdragon, formerly in the Figwort Family (*Scrophulariaceae*) which includes Texas Sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*). But recent DNA sampling revealed differences, and now has a new family classification, *Plantaginaceae*, along with two other genera.

Considered a cool-season annual in South Texas, Snapdragons survive light freezes as we experienced last week. However, when temperatures rise, plants die back and should be replaced with warm-season annuals.

**See snapdragons in annual beds on the walkway to the Sam Jones Orchid Conservatory, and in the Butterfly Garden and Butterfly House.**

### **DRUMMOND’S PINK MINT** (*Stachys drummondii*)

The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center says this species--commonly called “Pink Mint” or *Drummond’s Hedgenettle*, is unique to Texas. It was named for noted Scottish naturalist Thomas Drummond, who identified and collected more than 750 plant samples in the southwest U.S. and Northern Mexico in the 1830s, also identifying more than 150 birds!

Pink Mint produces multiple flower stalks with small lavender-pink tubular blossoms, white throat and lavender speckles, resembling tubular flowers in genus *Salvia*. It is a member of the Mint Family (*Lamiaceae*) along with most culinary herbs, salvias and coleus. At a distance, plants look like short mounds of light green foliage with lavender-pink flowers. Closer view shows simple, alternate oval heart-shaped leaves, 1-2 inches long with slightly serrated edges.



Pink Mint is one of our first spring-blooming wildflowers, liking cool temperatures. After blooming through April and May, flowers die back but should be left on plants to dry, returning from seedlings around November. These “weeds” to some are an important nectar source for resident butterflies in winter and early spring.

**See Pink Mint in Hummer and Butterfly Gardens, and Butterfly Hill, also naturally occurring in smaller groups in other gardens and sunny spots along the Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of February 6, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **JEWEL ORCHID** (*Ludisia discolor*)

Unusual Jewel Orchid is terrestrial, growing naturally on the forest floors of Southeast Asia, instead of on trees like many more commonly-known orchids. They prefer indirect light and well-drained soil—usually an orchid bark, peat moss and perlite mixture.

This easy-to-grow orchid is known for elegant dark maroon leaves with pink veins creating a pinstripe effect. Tiny white flowers less than .5 inch across with a distinctive yellow throat bloom on 4-6 inch stalks in winter, contrasting nicely with dark velvety foliage.

Jewel Orchid has a cascading nature but rarely grows beyond a foot high or wide, because its fragile pseudo-bulbs of this species break easily if handled.

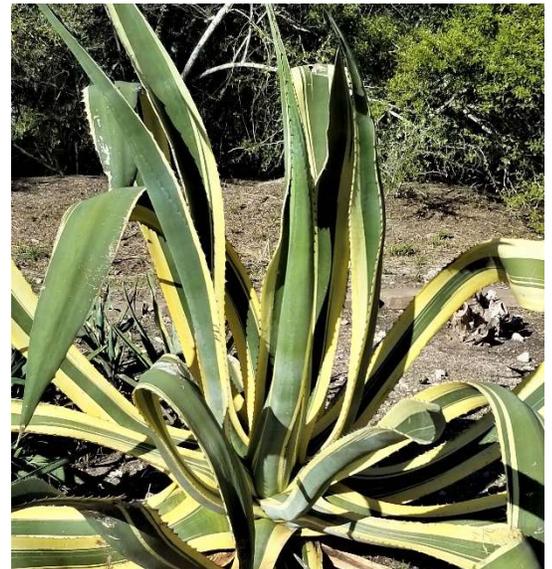


**See multiple unique Jewel Orchids currently in bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**

### **VARIEGATED CENTURY PLANT** (*Agave americana* 'Marginata')

Century Plant (*Agave americana*) is a large-growing succulent native to Northern Mexico and Central America. While the solid gray-green form is the most common, a variegated variety, 'Marginata', provides color year-round from its bright yellow leaf edges. Some think agaves are cactus, but instead are monocotyledonous succulents with fibrous leaves comprising their own family, *Agavaceae*.

Agaves have a rosette form; and the variegated version has large strap-like leaves 4-8 inches wide, up to 6-plus feet long at maturity—a bold statement in any succulent or cactus garden. Plants eventually produce a flower stalk, like the gray-green original form, with white flowers on a stalk towering 10-15 feet! After blooming, the original plant dies while small offsets, or “pups”, form at the base creating future generations.



**Even without a bloom stalk, this colorful Variegated Century Plant in the Arid Garden will turn heads, especially with few other natives displaying in winter!**

## BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of January 30, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### GENTING ROYAL DENDROBIUM ORCHID (*Dendrobium 'Genting Royal'*)

*Dendrobium 'Genting Royal'* is an orchid hybrid, a cross of Den. 'Kiilani Gold' x Den. 'Banana Royal,' originated in 2001 by Chaw Chin Sin. It is a hard-cane upright-growing *Dendrobium*, its stems reaching about 20 inches tall, with long narrow leaves remaining on youngest stems, which produce flowers. Long flower stalks with multiple lemon-yellow and white blossoms approximately 1.5-2 inches wide emerge from the top center of each cane.

Like many dendrobiums, tall plants prefer small pots and appear to be root-bound. But these are epiphytes not needing traditional soil, frequently potted in fir bark to hold plants upright while still providing aeration and drainage for aerial roots.

**See this strong winter bloomer in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, along with many other dendrobiums currently blooming in the rear greenhouse.**



### PURPLE SHOWERS MEXICAN PETUNIA (*Ruellia simplex 'Purple Showers'*)

Mexican Petunia in general is one of the easiest plants to grow even in hot, dry conditions. But many homeowners are afraid of them due to heavy seeding and thus invasive nature of the original varieties. Purple Showers, however, is a sterile, non-seeding variety which helps keep this vigorous plant in check!

Sometimes known as *Ruellia brittoniana*, botanists now are identifying this plant as *Ruellia simplex*, acknowledging its original name when first described in Cuba. The genus refers to French Botanist Jean Ruel, and species acknowledges simple instead of compound leaves on this species. This member of the Acanthus Family (*Acanthaceae*) also goes by common names of *Britton's Wild Petunia*, *Mexican Bluebell* and *Texas Petunia* in certain locales. *Ruellia* is a larval plant for Common Buckeye butterflies and nectar plant for butterflies and hummingbirds.



Purple Showers Mexican Petunia grows with upright stems maturing around 3 feet tall. The plant appears in clumps from underground rhizomes which expand quickly to 3-5 feet in a few years, if not regularly dug around the edges. Simple pinnate leaves are dark green with purple veins and underside. Individual blue-violet tubular blossoms are found near the tip of upright branches. It blooms prolifically nearly year-round, blooming best if cut back once or twice a year to stimulate new stems.

**See Purple Showers in containers in the Butterfly House; and used as a hedge in the front parking area.**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of January 23, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **LITTLE JOHN DWARF BOTTLEBRUSH** (*Callistemon viminalis* 'Little John')

"Little John" is a compact bottlebrush maturing 3-5 feet tall and wide at maturity. Thin, pointed, gray-green leaves about 2 inches long surround the branches with red flowers emerging from tips of branches between the leaves. Rather than 1 branch having a single flower, a synchronized opening of multiple flower buds with thin, dark-red petals, pistils and stamen resembling bristles, result in its common name "bottlebrush." Flower blossoms last several weeks at each of 2-3 bloom cycles a year.



'Little John' can be trimmed into a hedge, or separate medium-sized shrubs. Infrequent pruning is recommended between bloom cycles to prevent removal of flower buds. Bottlebrush are native to Australia but grown throughout much of the world. It is an excellent nectar plant for hummingbirds and butterflies. Most varieties are Zone 9 plants tolerating temperatures to mid-20s.

**See 'Little John' Bottlebrush along the walkway by the Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory, in front of Education Station, in the Sensory Garden or in front of the Hummingbird Garden, as it is an excellent nectar plant for both hummingbirds and butterflies.**

### **Agarita or Wild Currant** (*Mahonia trifoliolata*)

Agarita or Wild Currant goes by a wide range of common names and spellings, depending on geographic location, including *Agarito*, *Algerita*, *Laredo Mahonia*, *Laredo Oregon-grape*, and *Trifoliate Barberry*. While its leaves resemble a holly, it is a member of the Barberry Family, *Berberidaceae*.

This native shrub is common in South Texas brushlands stretching west to Arizona and Northern Mexico. It grows 3-8 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide, identifiable, even in winter when not flowering due to its evergreen, three lobed multi-pointed gray-green leaves.



Agarita produces clusters of golden cup-shaped 6-petal flowers in late spring/early summer. When pollinated, flowers produce clusters of red berries at maturity that are eaten by birds and wildlife and can be harvested for jam, jelly, or wine! Quail and small mammals also use it for cover. Roots provide a yellow dye, used by pioneers. Unlike many native plants, it can be found at private retail garden centers.

**See Agarita naturally growing along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of January 16, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **MYSTIC SPIRES SALVIA** (*Salvia X 'Mystic Spires'*)

Mystic Spires Salvia is a compact selection from a previous salvia hybrid, 'Indigo Spires,' a cross between *S. longispicata* and *S. farinacea*. While the original form commonly reaches 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide, Mystic Spires usually stays 18-32 inches tall, not sprawling as much as its predecessor, and a more reliable bloomer nearly year-round.

Spade-shaped leaves create uniform mounds of medium-green foliage for flowerbeds and a backdrop of flower stalks. Flower stalks are 10-14 inches long with individual dark blue flowers which open from the bottom, providing new flowers for many weeks before new flower stalks emerge. Like other salvia, tubular flowers have a large bottom lip with 2 thin white lines. Collectively, the flower stalks provide an eye-catching display of dark blue in any landscape.



Mystic Spires blooms consistently, while flowers provide an excellent nectar source for butterflies, hummingbirds and bees. It's a good alternative to taller perennials in flowerbeds, lasting 3-4 years without replacing. Spring pruning helps promote new growth, plant uniformity and fresh flowering cycle.

**See Mystic Spires Salvia around our Visitor Center, in Butterfly and Sensory Gardens, and in pots in front of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**

### **AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY** (*Callicarpa Americana*)

Winter is a slow time for native plant flowering, but you'll be pleasantly surprised at the enduring berry color of our American Beautyberry this year! This native perennial forms berries beginning as green clusters in summer, later transforming to fuchsia when ripening. Age of these berries and likely cooler temperatures have let remaining berries darken to burgundy, much darker than usual.

American Beautyberry is an understory shrub commonly growing 4-7 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide. Its large, slightly hairy pointed leaves with serrated edges are 2-3 inches wide and 3-6 inches long. Typically deciduous, it loses both leaves and berries by January; but in a mild winter, several specimens will keep leaves and berries longer. Berries also provide a necessary fall and winter food source for migratory songbirds.



**See American Beautyberry on Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden.**

## **BLOOMING in the GARDENS**

(week of January 9, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### **CATTLEYA MEMORIA ROBERT STRAIT 'ISLANDERS DELIGHT'**

(*Laeliocattleya Memoria Robert Strait 'Islanders Delight'*)

This orchid hybrid originated in 1990 as a cross between *C. walkeriana* X *C. 'Wayndora'*, hybridizer unknown. This plant produces 1-3 striking white and purple blossoms 3-3.5 inches across--in the traditional corsage orchid form for which *Cattleyas* are known. Unique color contrasts of the dark purple lip and purple streak down the center of petals creates a stunning display.

**See *Lc. 'Islanders Delight'* in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory. While prime blooming season for many other *Cattleya* in our region is September through November, there are still a lot of late season bloomers in our collection.**



### **COMMON REED** (*Phragmites australis*)

Common reed is a giant grass commonly growing on edges of ponds, marshes, streams and rivers in most of the mainland 48 United States. Reaching 6-9 feet tall, hollow canes .5 - 1 inch thick are covered with flat grass blades .5-1.5 inches wide and 12-18 inches long. A loose cluster of tiny brown flowers form at top of each cane making a plume usually flopping to one side, blowing in the wind.

**Common Reed grows around most of Gator Lake, providing shelter and seeds for bird colonies, particularly red-wing blackbirds. Submerged portions of all aquatic plants are habitat for many micro and macro invertebrates, which in turn are used as food by fish and other wildlife species including amphibians, turtles, and ducks.**



## BLOOMING in the GARDENS

(week of January 2, 2022)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING in the GARDENS** each week spotlights a featured exotic and native plant at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### DICK SMITH 'PARADISE' ORCHID (*Potinara Dick Smith 'Paradise'*)

This showstopping orchid produces spectacular medium-sized blossoms 3.5-4 inches across, with frilly lips, in multiple shades of purples and yellows—a consistent bloomer each year! Each flower stalk usually has 2-3 flowers, with plants remaining compact, typically 12-15 inches tall.

Potinara (abbreviated Pot.) is actually an orchid nothogenus for intergeneric hybrids containing at least one ancestor species from *Brassavola*, *Cattleya*, *Laelia* and *Sophranitis* as parent genera. Pot. Dick Smith 'Paradise' is a hybrid cross between *Pot. Hisako Akatsuka* x *Rlc. (Rhyncholaeliocattleya) Hawaiian Lightning*.

**See Pot. Dick Smith 'Paradise' orchid in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, with many other varieties, in this unusually prolific December bloom cycle!**



### LOTEBUSH (*Zizyphus obtusifolia*)

This native shrub, a member of the Buckthorn Family (*Rhamnaceae*), is known for its distinctive gray-green branches with 1-2 inch thorns, particularly noticeable in winter. Lotebush, a.k.a. Gumdrop Tree, Bluebursh, or Clepe, is a multi-trunked shrub reaching about 6 feet tall. It produces inconspicuous tiny yellow flowers, which if pollinated, result in hard, gumdrop-shaped pea-sized dark fruit after pollination, eaten by wildlife. It also provides good cover for quail due to its thorny nature. The oval-shaped leaves are 1-1.5 inches long, with slightly rounded serrated edges.

**See Lotebush in wooded areas on the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail and Oso Loop Trail.**

