



# **“Blooming in the Gardens”**

## **LIBRARY**

### **2024**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of August 11, 2024)

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

## BELINDA'S DREAM SHRUB ROSE (*Rosa* X 'Belinda's Dream')

"Belinda's Dream" is a medium-sized shrub rose, one of the most consistent performers in South Texas. Released in 1992, the stunning medium pink rose quickly was named an Earth-Kind Rose by Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service for its disease resistance, heat performance, easy care & good blooming. It did so well in statewide trials that it was the first rose to get the prestigious Texas Superstar designation in 2002.

Bred by Texas A&M mathematics professor, Dr. Robert Basye, it's a cross between climber (a.k.a. rambling rose) 'Jersey Beauty' x hybrid tea rose 'Tiffany'. Belinda's Dream can grow up to 5' tall & wide, but typically stays closer to 3'. Unlike many old roses given the Earth-Kind designation, Belinda's Dream is a "very-double" blossom with more than 100 petals, re-flushing with new growth, reblooming throughout the year.

Although disease resistant, some Black Spot fungus may appear in cool, damp weather; but won't affect plant vigor & bloom. Light pruning improves appearance & bloom frequency.



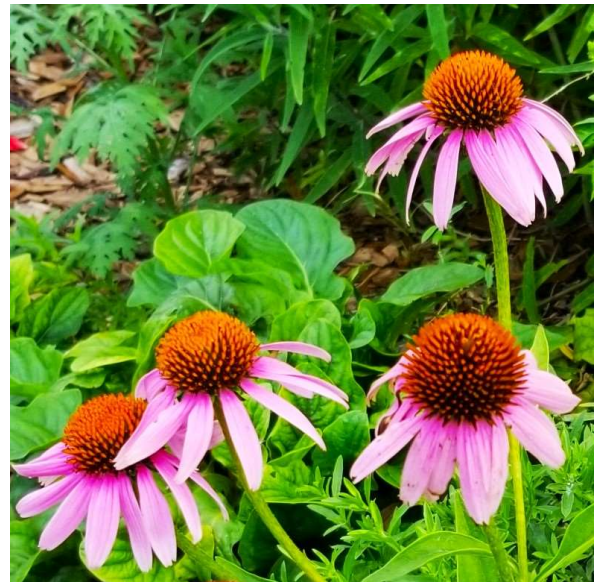
**See Belinda's Dream Rose planted in beds on front and back of Rose Pavilion in our Rose Garden blooming year-round.**

## EASTERN PURPLE CONEFLOWER (*Echinacea purpurea*)

Purple Coneflower not only is a popular medicinal herb for teas, but also an East Texas native flower naturally growing along edges of oak savannahs or prairies, from Texas up to Illinois & east to Florida & North Carolina.

"Echinacea" comes from the Greek work *echinos* meaning "hedgehog," referring to the brown spiny disc at the center of its striking flower. It commonly is called Purple Coneflower, Hedgehog Coneflower, or simply Echinacea which is its genus. Long-lasting flowers have a distinctive cone center with lavender petals extending out or slightly downward, each about 3" across.

Plants have medium green, wide foliage, most leaves about 12" tall; but flower stalks can rise to 24 or 30", towering above a dense base of foliage. In our area, Echinacea goes dormant in winter & leaves disappear, but returns in spring, emerging from hidden underground tubers.



Echinacea/Coneflower is a member of the Aster Family (Asteraceae) along with daisies, sunflowers, coreopsis, zinnias, marigolds & even lettuce. Coneflowers are great additions to garden spaces with good drainage, attracting butterflies when blooming. Traditionally used externally for burns, wounds & insect bites, some native American tribes used it for cold symptoms, coughs, sore throats and pain relief.

**See specimens blooming in the Butterfly Garden.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of August 4, 2024)

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## CRIMSON STAR DESERT ROSE (*Adenium obesum* X *A. swazicum*)

Desert Rose has become increasingly popular in recent years due to easy care & drought tolerance. It is indigenous to the Sahara, subtropical eastern Africa & Arabian Peninsula. It likes full sun & can tolerate occasional dry periods. It is tropical & must be protected from freezes. Even night temperatures in the 40s will trigger winter dormancy.

Crimson Star Velvet Leaf Desert Rose is actually a cross between common desert rose (*Adenium obesum*) & a rare velvet leaf dwarf variety (*A. swazicum*). It has velvety-textured gray-green leaves, & the dark crimson flowers have narrower petals than common desert rose.

These succulents are revered for not only beautiful flowers, but also a fattened trunk or “codex” storing water & nutrients. Keeping them in smaller pots helps keep the base enlarged.

Desert Roses have sticky latex sap which can be a skin & eye irritant. Plants are toxic if ingested as are other close relatives in the Dogbane Family (Apocynaceae) such as plumeria (*Plumeria rubra*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), vinca or Madagascar periwinkles (*Catharanthus roseus*), & milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.).

**See a large potted specimen of Crimson Star Desert Rose in the rock beds in front of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**



## COOPER'S WHITE RAINLILY (*Cooperi drummondii*)

Cooper's White Rain Lilies are recognized by vibrant white flowers “magically” appearing after rain. Each flower has 6 petals on the end of a 12” leafless stem emerging from an otherwise unnoticed bulb. Flowers last only a few days. If pollinated, a three-lobed seed pod forms at the tip with a black paper-like seed inside. Smooth green grass-like leaves also appear after flowering. This wildflower native to Texas & Louisiana provides a welcome surprise to fields & flowerbeds after strong precipitation.

Otherwise, the plant has a couple of thin, strap like leaves blending in with grass blades unnoticed like the leafless bulb lying dormant under soil. Heavy rain triggers flowering, an adaptation matching higher chance of pollinator activity after rains. Variations include a pale pink tint on petals, plus a yellow-flowering cousin, Showy Zephyrlily (*Zephyranthes pulchella*).

**See Cooper's White Rainlily near the Hummingbird Garden & around Monkey Mansion Playground; but visit soon since this plant's post-rain blooming cycle is short!**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 28, 2024)

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

Plumeria 'Pinot Rouge' consistently has been blooming all summer, rare for 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. Our specimen blooms summer through fall until removed for winter protection early November. This plumeria is an eye-catcher, but also turns heads with a sweet vanilla-jasmine scent.

Plumeria are members of the Dogbane (Apocynaceae) Family which includes Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*), Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*) & annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*). Here, plumeria thrive in hot sunny conditions, peak bloom July through September with fewer blossoms moving into cooler autumn temperatures.



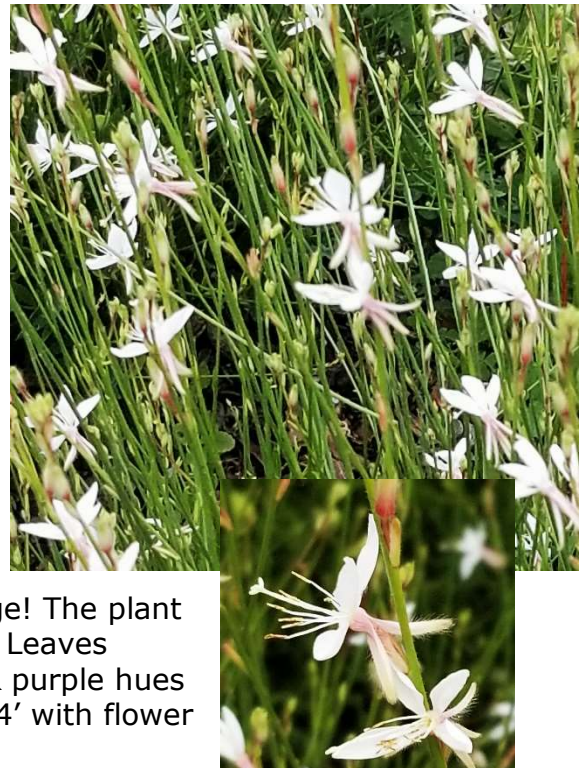
**Plan to visit the 'Plumeria Grove' before the end of October when plants will be removed for their long winter nap under guidance of the Plumeria Society of South Texas.**

## WHITE BUTTERFLY GUARA (*Oenothera lindheimeri*)

Butterfly Guara is an excellent but underused native landscape plant with a range from Louisiana & Texas into Mexico. It gets its common name from the dainty white blossoms less than an inch across opening in the morning on tall thin stalks that, as petals fold back, look like butterflies dancing in the wind. It also has pale & dark pink varieties. Although dainty & attractive, don't smell them, since some compare the scent to cat urine!

Other common names include Butterfly Gaura, Whirling Butterflies, Wandflower, Lindheimer's Beeblossom, and Lindheimer's Gaura. It is a member of the Evening Primrose Family (Onagraceae) & a cousin to the common pink Mexican Primrose, a wildflower seen throughout South Texas.

Guara actually prefers semi-dry conditions & full sun like here in the Coastal Bend, making sure it has good drainage! The plant has an open-vase shape, branching in multiple directions. Leaves change from dark green in summer & going to red, gold & purple hues in autumn. Plants typically grow 12-24" but may reach 3-4' with flower stalks.



**See White Butterfly Guara in the Butterfly Garden near the Rose Garden lawn.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 21, 2024)

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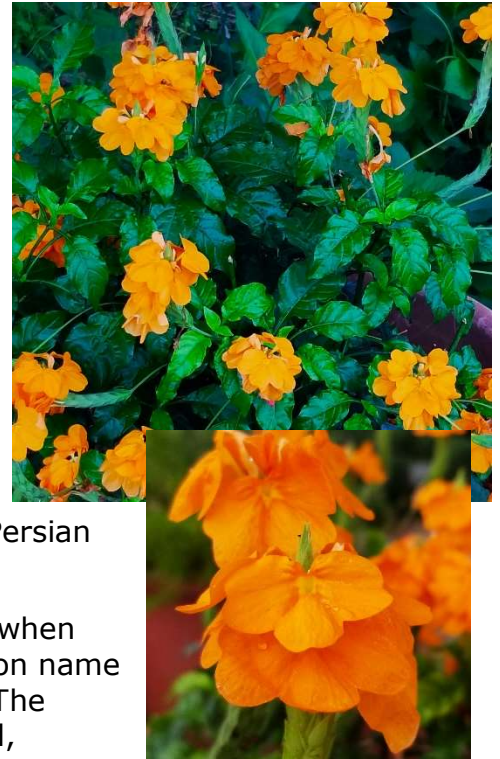
## CROSSANDRA ORANGE MARMALADE

(*Crossandra infundibuliformis* 'Orange Marmalade')

Crossandra 'Orange Marmalade' is a stunning tropical known for its apricot-orange flower spikes contrasting with glossy dark green foliage. It will freeze so in our area must be used as a landscape annual or container plant. It can withstand heat, but should be grown in shade or partial shade for best results with our intense South Texas summer sun.

Crossandra is part of the Acanthus Family (Acanthaceae) including common landscape plants like Shrimp Plant (*Justicia brandegeana*), Desert Honeysuckle (*Justicia spicigera*); Flame Acanthus (*Anisacanthus quadrifidus*) & Mexican Petunia (*Ruellia brittoniana*). Tropical cousins include Flamingo Flower (*Justicia carnea*), Polka Dot Plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*) & Persian Shield (*Strobilanthes dyeriana*).

Like its cousin in genus *Ruellia*, it has seed pods that “explode” when ripe & exposed to moisture or high humidity giving it the common name “firecracker plant” in some regions, but not in most of the U.S. The species name *infundibuliformis* means funnel or trumpet-shaped, referring to the flower shape.



**See Crossandra in containers in Butterfly & Sensory Gardens.**

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

'Gold Star' Esperanza, a.k.a. Yellow Bells, was a sport of the native Yellow Esperanza found in Northern Mexico & West Texas. The true native variety has slightly smaller flowers & thinner, pointed leaves. 'Gold Star' typically grows 6-7' tall, but can be kept 3-5' with annual spring pruning. It prefers good drainage growing in both clay & sandy soils. Plants will form bean-shaped seed pods which if removed will promote additional flowering.

Gold Star Esperanza is a phenomenal bloomer in South Texas summer landscapes. Not only do they brighten scenery with bright yellow tubular flowers, but also attract hummingbirds & butterflies.

'Gold Star' Esperanza was one of the first plants named a Texas Superstar by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for outstanding growth & flowering in gardens throughout Texas, still prolifically flowering despite soaring summer temperatures & drought conditions. Esperanza plants are deciduous, going dormant & dropping leaves in winter, so they need to be planted with shrubs and perennials that hold leaves to prevent a barren winter landscape.



**See 'Gold Star' Esperanza in the Botanical Gardens parking area, Butterfly Hill Pollinator Garden, Hummingbird & Earth-Kind Demonstration Gardens.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 14, 2024)

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## SAPPHIRE SHOWERS DURANTA (*Duranta erecta* 'Sapphire Showers')

'Sapphire Showers' Duranta, is a semi-tropical shrub & profuse summer bloomer in South Texas. *Duranta erecta*, native to much of South & Central America as well as Caribbean Islands, also is called Brazilian Sky Flower due to light blue or white blossom color of the wild forms. The 'Sapphire Showers' cultivar was a selected for dense growth habit & striking dark purple flowers with white edges.



Known for fast growth in warm weather, this dense shrub has small, glossy green leaves, a great backdrop to its profusion of blossoms. A great pollinator plant, flowers attract a wide range of butterflies for nectar & bees for pollen. High presence of pollinators also results in frequent formation of yellow berries resulting in an alternate common name, 'Golden Dew Drop.' It was named a Texas Superstar Plant by Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service for its adaptability & successful growth in trial gardens throughout the state.

This plant needs space! While 'Sapphire Showers' sometimes is described as compact, it easily can grow 6-9' tall. Annual spring pruning to 1-2' will help keep it shorter.

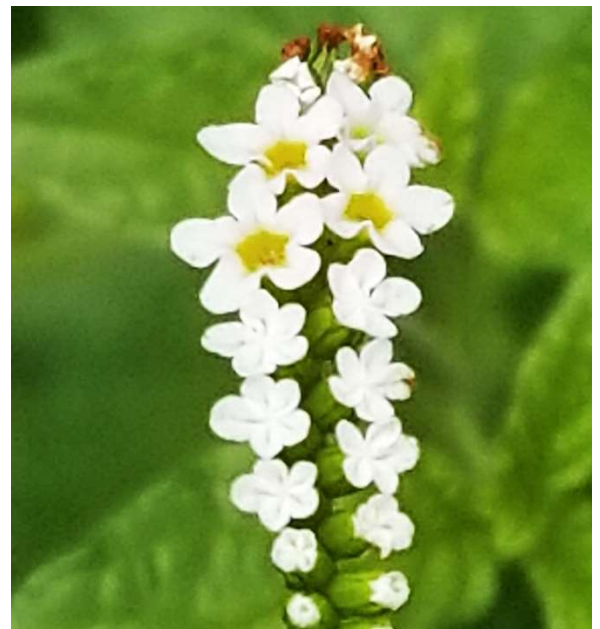
**See 'Sapphire Showers' behind the Visitors Center Entrance fountain.**

## SCORPION'S TAIL (*Heliotropium angiospermum*)

Scorpion's Tail is a member of the Borage/Forget-Me-Not Family (Boraginaceae), which is known for hairy leaves & stems. Indigenous to Texas and Florida, it also grows in Mexico & the Caribbean also going by common names of Sore Bush, Bright Eye Bush & Cat Tongue Rooster Comb. Sore Bush refers to its reported medicinal qualities in the Caribbean where it's used for stings, itches, sores & cuts, conjunctivitis (pink eye) & infant colic.

Scorpion's Tail commonly is a low-growing 1-2' tall shrub used as a groundcover; but also can reach 3' tall or more. An annual in northern areas, but will grow for multiple years in other areas when freezes are absent.

Tiny white flowers grow in 2 rows along a rachis (flower stalk midrib); & will produce seeds helping it fill in as a groundcover. Preferring sunny to partly-sunny areas & moderately moist soil, it's good nectar source for a wide range of butterflies, blooming nearly all year.



**See Scorpion Tail in the Butterfly Garden close to the Sam Jones Orchid Conservatory bridge.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of July 7, 2024)

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

The 'Broga Tiger' Orchid, nearly 3' tall & wide, is an impressive specimen! *Grammatophyllum* orchids commonly are known as Queen of Orchids because of their enormous size. Plants are fast growing & broad leaves about 3" wide & 18-24" long compare to sugar cane leaves resulting in another common name, "sugar cane orchids."

*Grammatophyllum* 'Broga Tiger', hybridized in 2009 by Serdang Orchid Nursery in Malaysia by crossing *G. measuresianum* X *G. 'Tiger's Paw'*, is known for spectacular inflorescences frequently three' long & blooming up to 3 months due to large numbers of smaller fragrant flowers. Individual flowers are about 1" across with gold & bronze design resembling tiger stripes.



**Our specimen was donated to the Botanical Gardens by local orchid aficionado Richard Schmidt wanting orchid lovers around the area to enjoy this spectacular plant located in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**

## **NATIVE TURK'S CAP** (*Malvaviscus aroreus* var. *drummondii*)

Turk's cap is a native shrub distributed throughout much of Texas, growing as an understory plant in light shade, & can grow in full sun. The native form grows 3-5' tall & about 3' wide with shade-grown plants being taller. As an understory plant, it grows best in well drained soils with organic matter, but can adapt to poorer soils.

Red flowers 1-2" long emerge from branch tips but newer petals never fully unfurl, resembling rolled paper. With yellow pollen on fused stamen, pollinated flowers produce 1" round green fruit which eventually ripen turning red. Available in nurseries, there also is a rare sport with variegated leaves. A much larger growing "tropical" variety, now being sold as "Big Momma," has leaves about 4" wide & 4-6" long which are much more pointed than the accepted Texas native form with larger, heavier pendulous flowers hanging downward.



Turk's Cap is one of the best-known natives in the Cotton/Hibiscus Family (Malvaceae). It goes by variety range of common names including Drummond Turk's Cap, Drummond's Wax Mallow, Red Mallow, Texas Mallow, Mexican Apple, Sleeping Hibiscus, Bleeding Hearts. The most common Spanish name is Manzanita which means "little apple," referring to its small fruit. Turks Cap is an excellent wildlife food source, providing nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies, moths & other insects. The fruit also are eaten by mammals including humans. The fruit reportedly as a faint apple taste and can be eaten cooked or raw according the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center ([www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)).

**See native forms of Turk's Cap in red, pink & located in Butterfly, Hummingbird, EarthKind & Sensory Gardens & on Oso Ridge nature trail.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 30, 2024)

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## PLUMERIA 'CALIFORNIA SUNSET' (*Plumeria rubra* 'California Sunset')

'California Sunset' Plumeria is a showstopper! A seedling from 'Penang Peach', introduced by Jungle Jack's Plumeria became a plumeria collector's favorite with vibrant sunset colors & thick petals. Each flower is 2-4" across & frequently makes huge clusters all in bloom at once collectively 6-9" across, with a strong ripe peach fragrance! Early spring, flowers start out yellow, turning dark orange & red as things heat up. This plumeria also has a semi-compact growth habit, but is fast growing with an incredibly long bloom season compared to others.



Known as the Hawaiian lei flower, plumeria actually originated in the Caribbean & Tropical Americas. They're in the Dogbane Family (Apocynaceae) also including Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*), Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*) & annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*).

Always favorite flowers for semi-tropical areas, early summer heat has brought them into full bloom at the Botanical Gardens. Thriving in heat & sun, Plumeria bloom May through early October, peaking around the July 4th holiday here when hydrated with supplemental water like our recent big rain, growing noticeably larger!

**The Plumeria Garden, curated and cared for by the Plumeria Society of South Texas, definitely is worth a visit to experience these tropical treasures at their peak!**

## SEA OXEYE DAISY (*Borreria frutescens*)

Sea Oxeye Daisy is blooming phenomenally well in Coastal Bend lowland areas. The common name ox-eye comes from the 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 such as Bushy Seaside Tansy & Sea Daisy in other locales. Sea Ox-eye Daisy is found in coastal areas from Maryland to Texas down into Mexico.



Bright yellow daisy flowers 2-2.5" across appear in May through most of summer. An important nectar source for bees & butterflies, also after maturing, seeds are eaten by granivorous birds & its perennial nature provides cover for small wetland animals.

Sea Oxeye Daisy grows primarily upright 2-3' tall, reportedly up to 6 feet. The simple gray-green thick leaves with smooth edges are easy to recognize, becoming more succulent as they age making them more adaptable to harsh conditions.

Sea Oxeye Daisy is one of the most common flowers found in area wetlands, its presence often used as a wetland indicator! Tolerant of a variety of poor soil types including extremely salty/brackish sands & clay. It grows in extremes, surviving flooding periods with poor drainage as well as being extremely drought tolerant.

**Observe Sea Ox-Eye Daisy currently blooming along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail & along edges of wetland areas.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 23, 2024)

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## BASHAM'S PARTY PINK CREPE MYRTLE

(*Lagerstroemia* X 'Basham's Party Pink')

Basham's Party Pink Crepe Myrtle, frequently called Basham Crepe Myrtle, is one of the largest growing crepe myrtle trees in our area, reaching 20-30' at maturity with 15-20' canopy spread. From China & Southeast Asia, Crepe Myrtles are in the Loosestrife Family (Lythraceae), in a variety of sizes from 3-30' tall at maturity.

'Basham' is actually a hybrid of 2 different crepe myrtle species, *Lagerstroemia indica* crossed with *L. fauriei*. The result is a fast-growing form with "fun-tastic" mauve pink flower clusters. They bloom only in summer as crepe myrtles are long-day photoperiodic plants, blooming during extended days around summer solstice. This variety also has distinctive peeling grey/tan bark exposing reddish-brown trunk tones beneath old bark. Large, dark green leaves provide shade from spring through late fall, but are deciduous dropping leaves for winter.



With a USDA Zone 8 plant designation surviving temperatures to 10 degrees, Bashams did well after the big freeze. They are a good Xeriscape plant surviving drought conditions once fully established & blooming in the heat of summer.

Basham's Party Pink Crepe Myrtle introduced in 1965 by Texas plantsman, Lynn Lowrey, is considered the granddaddy of Texas hybrid crepe myrtles. Its outstanding performance throughout the state for more than 55 years also earned it the Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service's Texas Superstar designation.

**See Basham Crepe Myrtle in full bloom in the Botanical Gardens Parking Lot in front of Education Station and in the Sensory Garden.**

## BLANKET FLOWER (*Gaillardia pulchella*)

Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*), a common wildflower throughout Texas, is known for its dark rounded center & a single row of bright red petals with distinctive yellow serrated edges resulting in other common names like Firewheel, Indian Blanket, & 'Girasol Rojo' in Spanish.

Blanket Flower is part of the Asteraceae family, along with daisies, asters, cosmos & sunflowers. These plants are noted for their ray flower formation with dense centers resembling an eye called a 'disc flower', radiating out by colorful petals to attract pollinators. The center is actually a composite of many tiny flowers with multiple nectar sources, making it a great butterfly plant.

Plants only grow 12-24" tall with mossy green leaves covered with tiny hairs giving a sticky feeling if touched. Gaillardia are hardy annuals with several varieties earning Proven Winners designation.



**See Blanket Flower blooming in the Butterfly Garden, Butterfly Hill behind the Sensory Garden, & along the walkway between the Visitor Center & Samuel Jones Orchid House.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

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# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 16, 2024)

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## “HEAD OVER HEELS® BLUSH” DINNER PLATE HIBISCUS

(*Hibiscus moscheutos* 'Head Over Heels® Blush')

Dinner Plate Hibiscus (*Hibiscus moscheutos*), a cold-hardy, herbaceous, flowering perennial plant known for giant, show-stopping blooms, also goes by other names including Swamp Rose Mallow, Crimson-eyed Rose Mallow & Eastern Rose Mallow. Herbaceous green or reddish stems sprout from the ground late spring, quickly forming a small rounded shrub. This perennial hibiscus often is considered an heirloom plant because of its popularity in early to mid-1900s from southern to mid-Atlantic states into the Midwest. Popularity declined after fancy Tropical Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) came along, but renewed interest in hardy perennials has breeders to introduce a new generation of these old favorites including *Head Over Heels®* Series.



Flowers have multiple five-petal blossoms up to 6” across on large plants instantly attracting the eye. Flowers come in a variety of shades from white to dark red along with pinks and purples with a protruding fused pistil & stamen like other hibiscus. The shrub can grow 4-6’ tall & 3-4” wide with fast-growing tender stems turning light gray-brown at the base as they age. This “tender perennial” drops leaves in fall; stems freeze back in cold winters; but it re-sprouts each spring, soon begins flowering & continues blooming throughout summer. These perennial hibiscus varieties are classified as Zone 6 by USDA which means they are root hardy down to -10°F \surviving our mild winters.

Hibiscus are members of the Mallow Family (Malvaceae) along with Turk’s Cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii*), cotton & okra. They are important larval plants for multiple butterfly species including Common Checkered Skipper, Gray Hairstreak, Pearly Wood Nymph plus the Lo Moth.

**See *Head Over Heels® Blush* Hibiscus in front of the Orchid Conservatory; & other dinner plate varieties in the Tropical Garden, Butterfly House & backside of the berms behind the Rose Garden.**

## NATIVE PLANT VIOLET RUELLIA (*Ruellia nudiflora*)

Violet Ruellia or Violet Petunia is a low-growing late season wildflower in the Deep South from Alabama to Arizona stretching from Texas deep into Mexico & Central America, frequently found on the edge of wooded areas & adjacent open grassy spaces. The “petunia” common name is due to its frequent individual light violet tubular flowers about 1” across & 1-2” long appearing from April through October on stalks above low-growing grayish-green foliage. Leaves are about an inch wide & 2” long. Violet Ruellia foliage usually remains close to the ground—around 6-8” tall—but flower stalks can grow 12-18” in shaded areas if unmanicured.



Although it & other members of the genus *Ruellia* are called wild violet petunia, *Ruellia* are in the Acanthus (Acanthaceae) Family, not Nightshade (Solanaceae) Family like traditional cultivated garden petunias. It may have some medicinal uses as the Spanish name is Hierba de la Calentura, or “herb of the fever.” This *Ruellia* will reseed, but unlike its taller cousin, Mexican Petunia (*Ruellia simplex* a.k.a. *Ruellia brittoniana*), it doesn’t form dense clumps of thick stems so it’s easy to mow.

An important larval plant for multiple butterflies--Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*), White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*), Cuban Crescent (*Anthanassa frisia*) & Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*), the flowers provide a nectar source for both butterflies & hummingbirds.

**See Violet Ruellia in the Butterfly Garden as well as grassy areas behind the Sensory Garden & Butterfly Hill, near the EarthKind Demonstration Garden & Arid Garden.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 9, 2024)

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## 'ELSIE' PLUMERIA (Plumeria rubra 'Elsie')

Elsie, a stunning plumeria cultivar sometimes called "J.J. Elsie" or "Elise", is known for its semi-compact growth habit & thick branches. It is a Thai seedling of Plumeria 'Penang Peach' in the *Jungle Jack* collection, with large clusters of vibrant pink & white swirled blossoms with orange centers & rounded petals--a prolific bloomer with a "sweet & spicy" aroma! Although commonly known as the Hawaiian Lei Flower plumeria is actually native to the Caribbean & Tropical Americas.



The genus Plumeria was named in honor of 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Botanist & Catholic monk Charles Plumier who traveled to the New World documenting many plant & animal species. Another common name for plumeria, "frangipani," came from a fictional 16<sup>th</sup> century Marquis of Italian noble family Frangipani, known for their perfumes.

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

**The Plumeria Garden is in prime blooming season & these tropical beauties can give you a taste of the islands in your yard. The Plumeria Society of South Texas curates the nearly 100-plant collection at the Botanical Gardens, digging each plant & storing them bareroot in greenhouses November through early March.**

## HONEY MESQUITE (*Prosopis glandulosa*)

is a native small tree/large shrub found in the South Texas thorn scrub chaparral & through much of South, Central & West Texas. It grows 15-30' tall with multiple trunks & has deciduous compound leaves with many small, bright green leaflets less than .25" wide & .75" long. Mesquite is quite drought tolerant due to its large spreading root system drawing scarce water from grasslands, fields & streams giving it a "phreatophyte" designation. Its spring flush of leaf growth also is considered a sign of the end of winter!



Mesquite produces long spikes of small creamy white flowers looking like white caterpillars hanging from branch tips. After pollination, loose clusters of beans form maturing at 6-10" long, providing fair forage for livestock & wildlife, but can be toxic to livestock if a high percentage of their diet.

Despite stories of it moving into Texas with cattle drives, archaeologists have found mesquite use by Native Americans in Texas before western settlers, kept in check with wildfires & buffalo migration. The common name 'honey mesquite' came from sticky golden sap that often seeps from trunk or branches. In other areas, it may be called simply mesquite, glandular mesquite, or Algarroba. It's a member of the Fabaceae (Pea/Bean) Family along with woody native cousins: Huisache (*Vachellia farnesiana*), Texas Ebony (*Ebenopsis ebano*), Blackbrush (*Vachellia rigidula*), Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) & Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*). The family also includes common legumes such as sweet peas, cow peas, green beans, peanuts & even alfalfa.

**See these majestic sprawling in trees on the Brennecke Nature & Oso Creek Loop Trails.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of June 2, 2024)

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

## AIR PLANT (*Tillandsia ionantha*)

Most frequently called “Air Plant,” this colorful bromeliad doesn’t need soil to live. Like many bromeliads & orchids, it is considered a lithophyte—living on rocks; or an epiphyte--living on a tree branch or trunk without withdrawing water or nutrients.

Plants form a tight rosette of gray-green leaves (due to scales) making small clumps of plants over time. When the plant nears bloom, its leaves turn bright pink & purple tubular flowers emerge between leaves near the plant’s center.

They obtain moisture from humidity through tiny vessels located on their leaves called trichomes that capture nutrients & moisture from the air. These “air plants” are extremely easy to grow, often being placed in shells or glued to ornaments. As a member of the genus, *Tillandsia*, it is a close relative of our native Ball Moss (*T. recurvata*), Giant Ball Moss (*T. baileyii*) and Spanish Moss (*T. usneoides*).

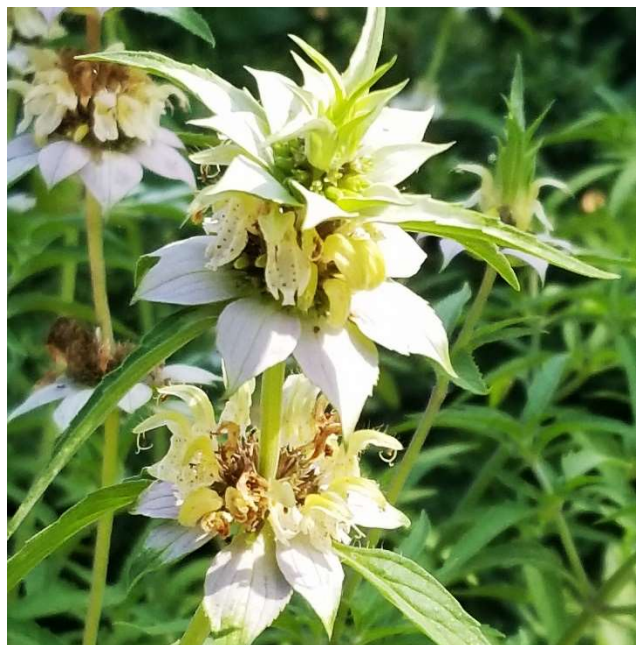


**See blooming Air Plants in the Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory & Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, either mounted on wood or growing in wood slat orchid baskets to provide support & excellent drainage.**

## HORSEMINT (*Monarda punctata*)

Horsemint, also known as Lemon Beebalm or Spotted Beebalm, is perennial with aromatic foliage naturally growing in prairies, plains, meadows, pastures & savannas Texas north to Minnesota & in most states in the east. A frequent component in wildflower mixes blooming from April-September, it attracts butterflies and is particularly important for native bees.

It can range from 6” to 3’ tall, typically about 2’ in our area. It produces tall flower spikes with circular layers of bracts—specialized colorful leaves in striking stands of purples, pinks, whites & yellows attracting pollinators for extended periods. The actual tubular yellowish flowers emerge from the bracts.



Horsemint is in the Lamiaceae (Mint) Family along with salvia, coleus & many common culinary herbs. It reportedly was used medicinally with fresh leaves crushed & steeped in cold water & then drunk to ease backaches, also used for fever, inflammation & chills. That may explain why Carl Linnaeus, the “father of taxonomy,” named its genus, *Monarda*, in honor of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish physician & botanist, Nicolas Bautista Monardes (1493-1588) who studied medicinal plants in Spain.

**See Horsemint currently blooming in the Butterfly Garden.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 19, 2024)

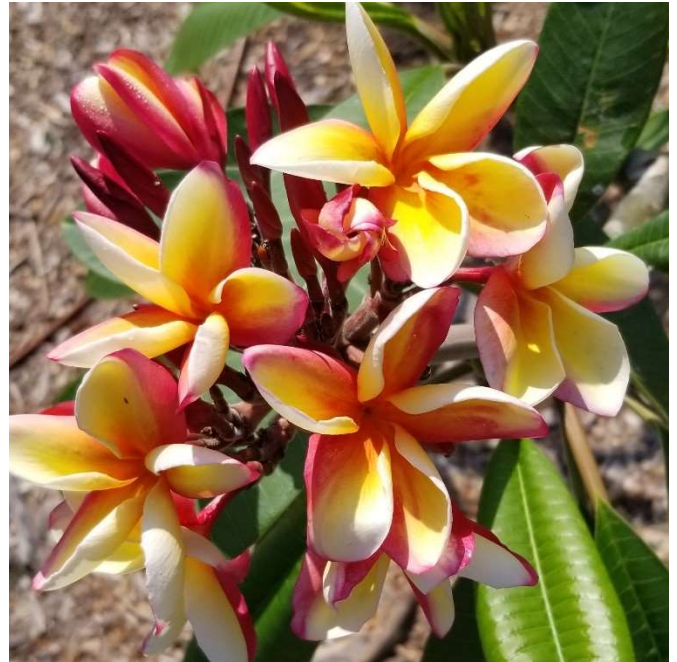
Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, try in your landscape, or simply increase your horticultural knowledge!

## 'LAVA FLOW' PLUMERIA (*Plumeria rubra* 'Lava Flow')

Plumeria are favorites for semi-tropical areas like Corpus Christi & the Coastal Bend. Lava Flow is often one of our first varieties in full bloom in our collection, after being stored bareroot all winter, replanted in March.

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

Plants are moderate growers, adding 12-24" of compact growth during its growing season. Plumeria need full sun & well-drained soil, also working in pots, but need regular fertilization.



**Lava Flow is one of about 90 large plumeria plants in the Plumeria Garden, maintained by the Plumeria Society of South Texas, in full bloom in summer months. Also called Frangipani, plumeria are best known for their use in Hawaiian lei production.**

## HEARTLEAF SKULLCAP (*Scutellaria ovata*)

Contrary to its common name, Heartleaf skullcap does not have heart-shaped leaves. As noted by the species "ovata," the fuzzy blue-green leaves with slightly serrated edges actually have an oval shape. The velvety leaves provide not only color contrast to green gardens, but also an added sensory factor & provide nectar for butterflies.

It is a low-growing, spreading perennial that typically 6-12" tall, creating groundcover for flowerbeds or butterfly gardens, but it can be taller with more shade. From April through mid-summer, flower stalks soar above the velvety foliage displaying small individual blue blossoms with white throats less than .5" wide, emerging above velvety foliage, similar to its salvia cousins.

Heartleaf skullcap is a member of the mint family along with salvia, coleus & many culinary herbs like oregano, basil & rosemary. It naturally grows in the eastern half of the U.S. from Texas to Minnesota, east to the Atlantic coast.



**See Heartleaf skullcap serving as a perennial butterfly nectar plant in our Butterfly Garden across from the Butterfly House entrance near the caterpillar topiary.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 12, 2024)

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

## NINETTE ROCK ORCHID (*Bulbophyllum falcatum* 'Ninette')

Ninette Orchid is considered both an epiphytic & lithophytic orchid native to hot lowland & submontane forest regions of central & west Africa. Epiphytes cling to tree trunks without taking water or nutrients. Similarly, lithophytes live on rocks, gaining nutrients as they are washed down the rock face, absorbed by the orchids' firmly clinging roots.

"Ninette" typically blooms in spring with tiny flowers about one third inch across appearing on a flattened flower stalk (rachis) 6-10" long looking like an elongated flattened peapod with tiny peas that have broken open on the edges. Individual flowers have a maroon base with a yellow lip petal about .5" long, & other petals and sepal rolled out, appearing like an open sphere at the base. Flowering in greenhouses blooms can last several weeks late winter through mid-spring.



See this unusual specimen blooming in the rear section of the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, accompanied by other blooming orchid genera like cattleyas (corsage orchids), phalaenopsis (moth orchids) & paphiopedilums (lady slipper orchids) during their spring bloom cycle.

## ENGLEMAN'S DAISY (*Engelmannia peristenia*)

Engelmann's Daisy is a member of the aster/daisy family Asteraceae, unusual as a monotypic genus, meaning only 1 species in the genus. It was named after German-born botanist George Engelmann who settled in St. Louis becoming a plant identification leader throughout the Central US in the 1800s.

Sometimes called cut-leaf daisy, Engelmann's Daisy is a hardy perennial 18-24" tall with multiple branches emerging from a central crown. While it may die back during cold winters, it comes back each year. Light green leaves with serrated edges provide a backdrop for pale yellow daisy flowers 1-1.5" across which fully open in late afternoon, with slightly curled petals earlier in the day.



Engelmann's Daisy naturally grows from Texas to Mexico up to Kansas & Missouri. More common in western parts of Texas & Hill Country, it prefers dry clay & calcareous soils. It blooms frequently late spring & early summer along roadsides even in drought conditions due to its prominent taproot.

Arizona & Southeast

See Engelmann's Daisy on "Butterfly Hill," a monarch waystation planting behind our Sensory Garden adjacent to the Butterfly Garden.

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of May 5, 2024)

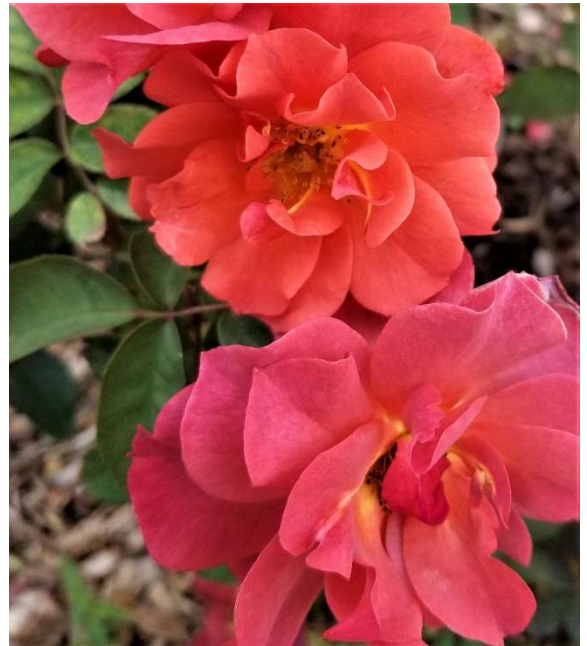
Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, try in your landscape, or simply increase your horticultural knowledge!

### CINCO DE MAYO FLORIBUNDA ROSE (*Rosa hybrida* 'Cinco de Mayo')

'Cinco de Mayo', a prolific flowering floribunda rose, its flowers described as a "blending of smoked lavender & rusty red-orange." Blooms open fully to 3.5" across, each with 20-25 petals like other floribundas & 3-5 blossoms common on each stem. This floribunda rose grows 3-4' tall with glossy green foliage & rounded, bushy growth habit.

Introduced by Weeks Roses in 2009, 'Cinco de Mayo' was a hybrid cross of red/white 'Topsy Turvy' & bright yellow 'Julia Child' floribundas. It also was an All-American Rose Selection (AARS) Winner in 2009, an award bestowed annually upon roses that outperform all others in American gardens & vases.

"Cinco de Mayo" literally means "Fifth of May," & is an annual celebration of the 1862 victory of the Mexican army over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War. This week many South Texans celebrate the holiday!



**See 'Cinco de Mayo' floribunda roses in raised beds in the Rose Garden. March-May is prime bloom season for roses in South Texas with fewer blossoms present during summer heat.**

### COMMON SUNFLOWER (*Helianthus annuus*)

Common sunflower is one native plant whose benefits may be overlooked due to abundance & familiarity. While the large flowering hybrids are sought for their many seeds, the smaller flowering forms growing wild are important for wildlife.

When water is abundant, plants quickly grow 6-8' tall, a nuisance if not in the right place. However, dedicating a corner to them provides nectar for adult butterflies, leaves for caterpillars, pollen for bees & eventually seeds for migratory songbirds. In South Texas, it is the larval plant for Bordered Patch (*Chlosyne lacinia*), American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*) & Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) caterpillars.



The golden yellow petals & dark brown centers appear to be a large flower; however butterflies see the dark center of sunflowers, & relatives in the Asteraceae Family that have this ray-flower configuration, as hundreds of individual flowers for nectar at a single landing site. That makes it an efficient feeding site for butterflies.

**See sunflowers in the Butterfly Garden & on Butterfly Hill, periodic specimens along the Oso Loop Nature Trail & a few in our main parking lot by Mexican Petunias (*Ruellia brittoniana* 'Purple Showers').**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of April 21, 2024)

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

## FANTASIA VIOLET ZONAL GERANIUM

(*Pelargonium x hortorum* 'Fantasia Violet')

Zonal geraniums are spring favorites in Texas, & Fantasia 'Violet' is one of the most vibrant! While somewhat heat tolerant, most gardeners use them as spring pot color until early summer. Fantasia series creates uniform mounding plants about 12" high & wide. Flower stalks with violet-pink petals rise above foliage with 3-4" showy round blossom clusters lasting 1-2 weeks. Geraniums need regularly dead-heading, removing old blossoms, promoting new flower stalk formation through the season. Flowers attract bees & hummingbirds.

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



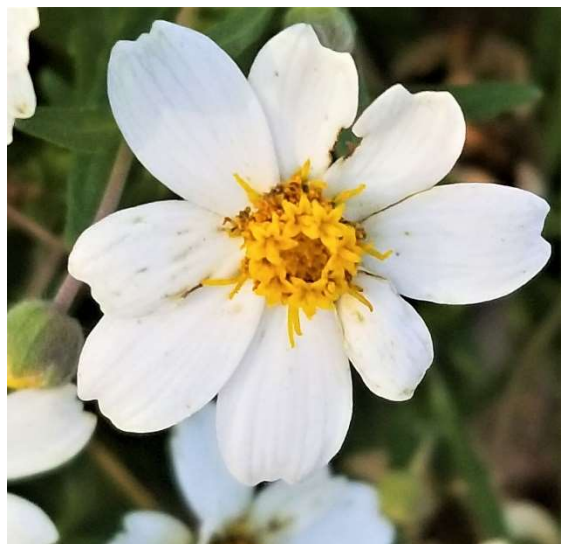
**See containerized geraniums in bloom as you enter the Visitor Center, in front of the Orchid House and in the Butterfly Garden/House.**

## BLACKFOOT DAISY (*Melampodium leucanthum*)

Blackfoot Daisy is a low-growing native wildflower thriving in calcareous soils from Oklahoma & Colorado to Mexico & west into Arizona. In other regions, this member of the Aster/Sunflower Family, Asteraceae also may be called Rock Daisy, Plains Blackfoot or Arnica.

Blackfoot Daisy closely resembles White Desert Zinnia (*Zinnia acerosa*) or white classic zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolius*). It has 8-13 white ray petals with toothed terminal edges surrounding a yellow center disc, while the zinnia have fewer petals. Solitary flowers are approximately 1" across & may have a slight honey scent.

Plants grow as small mounds 6-12" tall with narrow linear green leaves about an inch long. They're commonly used for color in arid gardens with high heat tolerance & low water requirements plus ability to thrive in full sun. They require good drainage as they don't like wet feet. They are important nectar sources for bees & butterflies in dry regions.



**See Blackfoot daisy blooming in the Butterfly Garden & Butterfly House.**

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of April 14, 2024)

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

### TRUMPET PLAYER'S MYRMECOPHILA ORCHID (*Myrmecophila tibicinis*)

The name “Trumpet Player’s Myrmecophila” Orchid comes from enlarged hollow pseudobulbs which can be dried and made into a horn to call children home from playtime in Central America! First described in 1938 under the name *Epidendrum tibicinis* (Bateman ex Lindley), it has been reclassified several times, now in the genus *Myrmecophila*.

This large orchid species, one of the most impressive plants in our collection, is indigenous to lower elevations of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Costa Rica, Venezuela & Columbia, growing on tree trunks & larger branches in deciduous forests, but growing best in cultivation if mounted. Known for its large, conical, hollow pseudobulbs up to 18” long & 2-3” across, provides habitat for ants in tropical forests.

Plants typically bloom March & April if given a dry period in winter. Long flower spikes can reach 6-15’ with a cluster of about 10 fragrant purple-pink blossoms appearing at the end of each spike. Each pinkish purple blossom is about 3” wide with slightly rippled petals & distinctive lip with a golden throat & dark red markings with purple on the end of the lip.



**See Trumpet Player’s Myrmecophila now blooming in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory along with many other orchid genera during the spring bloom cycle.**

### MEXICAN BUSH SAGE (*Salvia leucantha*)

Mexican Bush Sage is considered by most a South Texas native although primarily indigenous to Mexico. Available in most nurseries, it is one of the most popular “native plants” in Texas due to consistent growth & performance in landscapes plus drought tolerance.

Velvety purple or white tubular flowers emerge from purple sheaths on flower spikes blooming several months as new buds form & open over time. The plant has long narrow gray-green leaves & grows to about three feet tall, but flower spikes sometimes extend another 12” higher late in the season. As flower spike matures, dead flowers may require removal of stalks, with deadheading promoting new flower spikes.

Mexican Bush Sage prefers full sun for maximum bloom, but can grow in partial shade making it leggy at times. This true perennial needs to be cut back each spring to keep it compact & full. Vigorous summer growth may require light pruning prior to fall hummingbird migration for a new flush of flowers.



**See Mexican Bush Sage, both a hummingbird & butterfly attractor currently in bloom in the Butterfly Garden, but also is in bud in the Hummingbird Garden, “Butterfly Hill” behind the Sensory Garden & with other Texas A&M Agrilife Texas Superstars® in the EarthKind Demonstration Garden.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of April 7, 2024)

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

## DANCING LADY ONCIDIUM ORCHID (*Oncidium sphacelatum*)

This bright yellow *Oncidium* orchid is a favorite for consistent blooming with spectacular long flower spikes full of lightly-fragrant, tiny yellow blossoms! “Dancing Lady” was named for flowers resembling women in bright yellow dresses. In Sri Lanka, it is called the *Kandyan dancer* orchid. Some call it *Mother’s Day* orchid for its consistent late spring bloom, this year well ahead of the May holiday.

The large flat pseudobulbs have 2-4 medium to dark green leaves. Long, branched flower spikes emerge from leaf-bearing sheaths in late spring cascading well past the pot. Spikes up to 6’ long have 100 or more tiny yellow blossoms with mottled brown splotches.

Native to Mexico through Central America & into eastern Venezuela, this epiphyte is found in tropical & mountain rain forests. Its popularity is due to re-flowering with minimal culture & care requirements.



**See multiple Dancing Lady Orchids currently in bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, accompanied by many other species including other orchid genera like *Cattleyas*, *Phalaenopsis*, & *Paphiopedilums*.**

## PINK EVENING PRIMROSE (*Oenothera speciosa*)

Pink Evening Primrose is a low-growing native wildflower found in abundance in much of Texas. Native to grasslands from Northern Mexico up through Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri & Nebraska, they are one of the first wildflowers in bloom this spring, a precursor to other species including verbenas, pimpernel, dandelions, & of course, bluebonnets.

It goes by multiple common names including Pink Ladies, Showy Evening Primrose, Mexican Primrose, Amapola & even Buttercups due to yellow centers. Despite the common name, southern populations of this flower open in morning, closing at night. However, plants in northern regions are reversed creating a lot of confusion around a good common name.

Individual light pink 4-petaled flowers about 1.5” across create a cuplike appearance with distinctive pink veins, white centers & vibrant yellow stamen emerging from the center. Colors may range from darker pink to white. Each flower lasts only 1 day, but plants consistently bloom February through July.

The vegetative portion of the plant has a low-growing, sprawling form 12-24” across. Simple leaves can be harvested for use in as salad greens, but best flavor occurs with young plants before flowering. Seed capsules attract birds, especially finches.



**See early flowering Pink Evening Primrose along native grassy areas, particularly between the playground & Arid Garden.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of March 31, 2024)

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

## MISS ALL-AMERICAN BEAUTY HYBRID TEA ROSE

(*Rosa hybrida* 'Miss All-American Beauty')

'Miss All-American Beauty' is a favorite hybrid tea rose known for its large, full, fragrant deep hot pink blossoms. Flowers open fully to 4-5" per bloom able to be used for cut flowers due to long stems.

Miss All-American Beauty was hybridized by Christian Bedard as a cross between Chrysler Imperial x Karl Herbst. It was the 1968 All-American Rose Selection (AARS) winner, introduced in the US by Conard-Pyle Co. and simultaneously by Wheatcroft in the United Kingdom. This hybrid tea rose grows 3-6.5' tall with medium to dark, leathery green foliage. March-May is prime bloom season for roses in South Texas with fewer blossoms present during the heat of summer.

See a grouping of 'Miss All-American Beauty' hybrid tea roses in the back rose bed approaching the Rose Garden from the Plumeria Garden.

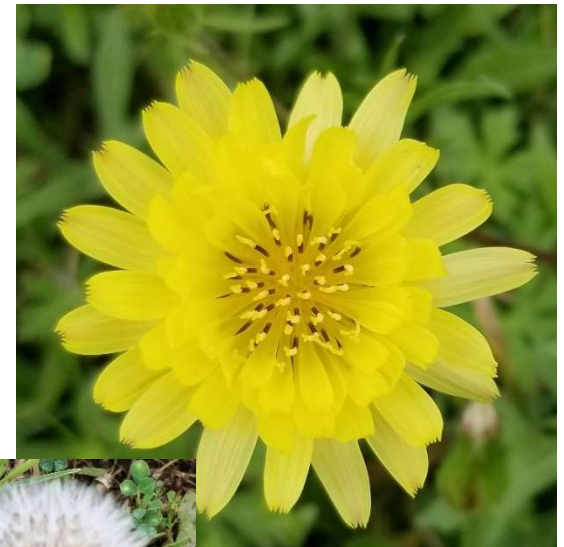


## TEXAS DANDELION (*Pyrrhopappus pauciflorus*)

The Texas Dandelion is a prominent low-growing, pale yellow flower seen along roadsides & in wildflower patches throughout South Texas in early spring, native to southern states from Arizona to Florida. Also called 'Small Flower Desert Chicory' & 'False Dandelion', it's in the Aster Family (Asteraceae) with daisies, sunflowers & mist flowers.

Plants hug the ground and are considered a broadleaf "weed" in cultivated turf areas. In spring, flower stalks stand 6-8" tall providing a blanket of .75" inch pale yellow flowers each morning closing by late afternoon. After pollination, the traditional dandelion fuzzy white seed head appears which allows for wind distribution of seeds & fun for kids as they make wishes blowing away the seeds.

**Foraging Texas** notes dandelion leaves, roots & young leaves able to be used in salad or boiled, used in wine, & roots roasted for a coffee. Vitamins A, B, thiamine, riboflavin along with protein. Medicinally, the flower is used as wound healer in a salve or infused oil. Roots & leaves are used for diuretic, antibacterial, laxative, sedative & appetite stimulant purposes.



flowers as edible with flowers sometimes substitute. It is rich in having minerals &

See Texas Dandelion mowed around in grassy areas by our parking area & Education Station. They also can be found in less formal grass areas & fields near the EarthKind Garden & between the Yellow Treehouse playground & Arid Garden.



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of March 24, 2024)

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## NOBLE ROCK ORCHID

(*Dendrobium nobile*)

Noble Rock is an epiphytic orchid native to southern China, the Himalayas & Indochina. Found in lowland & mountain forests preferring diffused light, during a bloom cycle, this orchid has 8-12" pseudobulb stalks or "canes" covered with 50 or more blossoms, each 2-3" across. Older stalks can rebloom with even more flowers in subsequent years creating upright stalks of sweet-scented raceme flowers close to the cane. Flowers vary in coloration, but our show-stopping specimen features white flowers with purple on ends of waxy petals with a striking dark purple throat! Flowering canes can last for 6-8 weeks in late winter or early spring.

**See several Noble Rock specimens currently blooming in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory's front section, along with other genera--cattleyas, phalaenopsis & paphiopedilums. Select orchids will be sold at the BIG BLOOM, Saturday, April 6!**



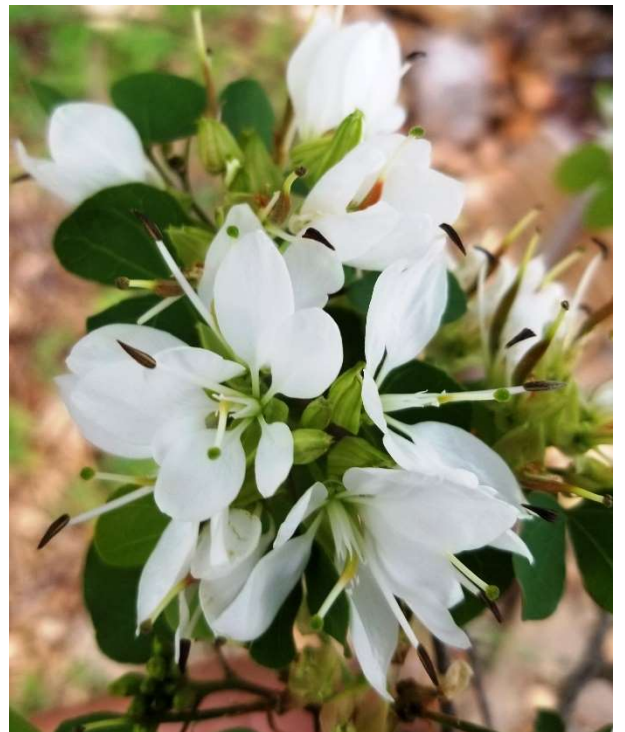
## ANACONCHO ORCHID TREE

(*Bauhinia lunaroides*)

Anaconcho Orchid Tree is the native form of West Texas orchid tree, a cousin of the popular purple flowering Hong Kong Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia purpurea*). This small tree only reaches 8-12', smaller than the exotic form or its South Texas-Mexican counterpart (*Bauhinia mexicana*). This multi-trunk shrub is revered for its silvery bark contrasting nicely with dark green double lobed leaves 1-1.5" long.

Clusters of small white fragrant flowers resembling orchids blossom from spring through fall, providing nectar for butterflies & bees in arid regions. Thin petals of multiple flowers may provide a pom-pom appearance. Anaconcho Orchid Tree is a member of the Pea Family (Fabaceae) along with local natives like mesquite, huisache & retama, all of which produce bean pods when flowers are pollinated.

**See several specimens of Anaconcho Orchid Tree currently blooming in the Butterfly Garden near the Orchid House Bridge.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of March 17, 2024)

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

## 'HANNAH RAY' WEEPING BOTTLEBRUSH

(*Callistemon viminalis* 'Hannah Ray')

"Hannah Ray" is a tall bottlebrush tree reaching 15-20' at maturity. Rapid growth produces longer thinner branches with a graceful, slightly weeping form, especially during flowering, compared to dwarf & standard red varieties. Leaves are slightly thinner, longer & softer textured than standard red bottlebrush (*C. citrinus*) or 'Little John' dwarf variety.

"Hannah Ray" has dark pink/rose, almost red flowers. Closer inspection reveals multiple flower buds on branch ends opening at once with thin petals, pistils & stamen resembling bristles, which when viewed collectively gave it the bottlebrush name. Flower blossoms last several weeks with 2-3 bloom cycles annually. They are excellent hummingbird & butterfly plants.

"Hannah Ray" can be pruned into tree form or large shrub or hedge with annual cut backs. If used as a hedge, infrequent selective cutting is the best option to prevent removal of flower buds at through the year.

Bottlebrush are native to Australia grown throughout much of the world. Most varieties are Zone 9 tolerating temperatures in mid 20s, but Hannah Ray survived upper teens during the deep freeze of 2021, re-sprouting from the base.

**See 'Hannah Ray' bottlebrush along the Bromeliad Conservatory walkway, Staples Street fence, & Hummingbird Garden.**



## TEXAS BABY BLUE EYES (*Nemophila phacelioides*)

"Baby Blue Eyes" is an early spring wildflower lasting for only a couple of weeks in late February through early April, with plants dying back from heat by June. Fuzzy pale blue flowers about .75" with white centers give them their common name; and a less common name in other areas, Flannel Breeches.

Plants grow 4-6" tall with gray-green, rounded hairy leaves. They make a striking show early, soon joined by other wildflowers tending to hide them due to their short stature. They grow in a variety of soils including clay, sand, loams, and caliche. Plants are ecologically important providing early sources of nectar & pollen for butterflies, moths, and bees.

"Baby Blue Eyes" is a member of the Waterleaf Family (Hydrophyllaceae), a subfamily of the Borages, with many of 20 related species identified as natural astringents.

**See "Baby Blue Eyes" most prominently in the Arid Garden; but also in grass areas, especially between Sensory & Arid Gardens, & on the Brennecke Nature Trail by the pathway to the Palapa Grande.**





# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of March 10, 2024)

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

## BLUE LACE CARPET PETUNIA (*Petunia multiflora* 'Carpet Blue Lace')

Petunias are traditional cool season annual flowers used in landscape plantings, container gardens & hanging baskets. Carpet petunias are low-growing selections helping fill annual color beds or gracefully drape over sides of pots. Blue Lace is popular for its light bluish lavender single flower with dark purple veins. Individual flowers are 2-3" across with plants reblooming from fall through mid-May in South Texas. Plants grow 10-12" tall, spreading 12-15" across. Soft hairy bright green leaves provide a backdrop for blossoms.



Native to South America, petunias are in the Nightshade Family (Solonaceae) along with tomatoes, peppers, eggplant & tropicals including popular angel trumpets (*Brugmansia* sp.); devil trumpets (*Datura* sp.); & yesterday, today and tomorrow plant (*Brunfelsia pauciflora*).

Petunias favor cooler temperatures & less intense sun usually blooming out & dying as temperatures increase & summer approaches.

**See Carpet Blue Lace Petunias currently blooming in the Earthkind Demonstration Garden; with other carpet petunia colors in entrance planters, beds around the Visitor Center & in the Butterfly Garden/Butterfly House.**

## BLACKBRUSH ACACIA (*Vachellia rigidula*)

Blackbrush Acacia, 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, also is called Blackbrush, Chaparro Prieto & Gavia. Blackbrush formerly was classified in the genus *Acacia* with older literature referring to it by scientific names *Acacia amentacea* & *Acacia rigidula*.

Blackbrush, one of the first South Texas plants to bloom in spring, features numerous 2" spikes of pale yellow frilly flowers 1-2" long, often appearing on bare branches before spring flush of leaves. Pollinated flowers result in small brown beans later in spring. Bees use Blackbrush for an early pollen source. Butterflies nectar on flowers, & granivorous birds feed on seeds after they drop. This plant has spiny stiff branches growing 4-12' tall creating a dense thicket, the white/gray bark contrasting with tiny dark green compound leaves.



Very drought tolerant, it's a good Xeriscape shrub, easily incorporated into arid landscapes & rock gardens, but rarely found in nurseries. This shrubby tree is a member of the Bean Family (Fabaceae) along with native woody cousins: Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), Ebony (*Ebenopsis ebano*), Huisache (*Vachellia farnesiana*), & Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*).

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

## BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of March 3, 2024)

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

### PYGMY ATROVIOLACEUM DENDROBIUM

(*Dendrobium atrovioleaceum* 'Pygmy')

This compact version of *Dendrobium atrovioleaceum* has thick, long-lasting, creamy white blossoms with purple spotting on petals & sepals, which can be seen on outsides of sepals before blossoms open. The dark purple lip petal is veined around the column giving it a striped appearance in the throat. Flowering usually occurs late winter or early spring lasting up to 2 months with multiple blossoms on each flower spike which remains relatively close to the medium green pseudobulbs.

This *Dendrobium* species naturally grows in New Guinea & surrounding islands, at elevations of 600-2500'. It grows as an epiphyte on large tree trunks in rainforests, thus preferring continuous growing conditions rather than temperature fluctuations to induce flowering.



See several examples of this specimen blooming in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory with **other Dendrobiums, Paphiopediums, Laelias, & Phalaenopsis.**

### TEXAS MOUNTAIN LAUREL (*Sophora Secundiflora*)

Texas Mountain Laurel, or Mescal, is a member of the Pea Family (Fabaceae) along with Mesquite & Retama. Its shiny dark, evergreen compound leaves provide a nice shrub base to a native plant landscape. In spring, clusters of lavender/blue flowers bloom for a few weeks, looking like grapes with an amazing grape soda scent!

This slow-growing shrub can be shaped into a small, ornamental, multi-trunked tree normally maturing at 10-15' tall, but occasionally can reach 25-30'. Its slow growth habit results in large specimen plants being somewhat expensive at nurseries. However, it is one of few natives readily available at retail outlets.

As a member of the Pea Family, pollinated flowers create long seed pods possibly lasting a year or more; but bright red seeds inside the pods are poisonous. Locally, it naturally grows in caliche outcroppings around Mathis, with a native range from Central Texas west to New Mexico & south to San Luis Potosi, Mexico.



**See Texas Mountain Laurel trees in the Sensory Garden, across from the Hummingbird Garden by the Brennecke Nature Trail entrance, Arid Garden. Flowers only last for a couple of weeks, so visit soon to experience the intoxicating sweet grape fragrance!**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of February 25, 2024)

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

## MEXICAN LAELIA ORCHID (*Laelia anceps*)

Mexican Laelia is a species native to orchids of Mexico's Sierra Madre Oriental, the eastern mountain range. It was first described by John Lindley in the *Botanical Register*, 1835. This epiphytic form has striking purple blossoms with pink/gold variations on the throat. Because they originate in mid-elevations of the mountains, they are hardier than many other orchids surviving a wide range of growing temperatures including 100°F to mild freezing temperatures in upper 20s, but I wouldn't risk it!

Due to brilliant colors & durability, Laelias are used in hybridizing & referred to in parentage of species crosses particularly with Cattleyas, producing a new genus name, *Laeliocattleya*.

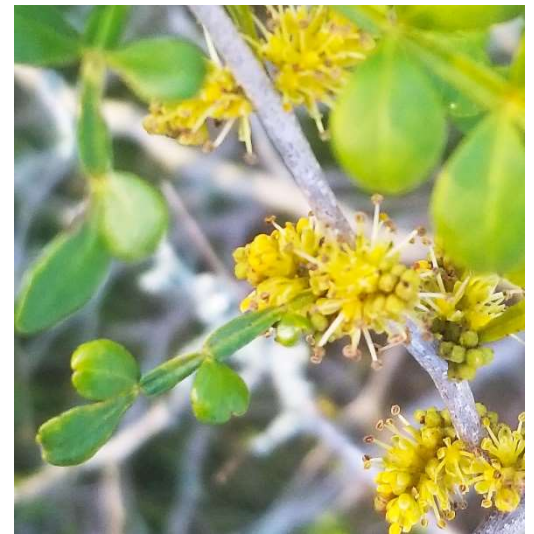


**See *Laelia anceps* in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory with other blooming orchids--phalaenopsis, paphiopedilums & dendrobiums. Visit often to see these spring blooming orchids as sunshine & warmer temperatures bring more orchids into bloom.**

## LIME PRICKLY ASH, a.k.a. Colima (*Zanthoxylum fagara*)

Lime Prickly Ash, often called by Spanish name "Colima" in South Texas, is a common native shrub in local brushland. Part of the Rue Family (Rutaceae), it's a cousin to citrus as the common name implies. Lime Prickly Ash is native to South Texas & Northern Mexico chaparral brush country plus Central & Southern Florida. This extremely drought-tolerant shrub grows 8-25' tall with a multi-stemmed trunk, producing tiny yellow flowers after summer rains followed by small edible orange berries currently present. The flowers with primarily yellow stamen & pistils are visible if you look carefully, blooming winter into spring.

Distinctive compound leaves help identify Lime Prickly Ash. Leaves have 5-13 leaflets arranged on the "winged" rachis looking like an extension of the leaf blade along a central rib. When crushed, the leaves release a lime aroma. Tiny blackish-brown curved thorns providing protection for the plant will catch clothing & bare skin. Growing in poor soils in full sun or partial shade as an understory shrub makes them good erosion control. Their evergreen nature also makes them good in 'nativescapes' with dark green winter foliage when many South Texas natives drop leaves.



It's a host plant for Giant Swallowtail Butterflies (*Papilio cresphontes*), the largest butterfly in North America! White-tailed deer browse on stems & foliage. Quail & other birds feed on small seeds, & small perching birds often nest in thorny branches. It is also larval host plant for American Snout butterfly (*Libytheana carinenta*), & in bloom is used as nectar plants for other butterfly species. Native Americans & pioneers used powdered bark & leaves as a sharp-tasting spice; all plant parts to numb mouth pain; but in smaller doses it produces a refreshing tingle, leading to *Zanthoxylum* being used in natural toothpastes & tooth powders.

**See many specimens of Lime Prickly Ash along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail, & other brushy areas.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of February 18, 2024)

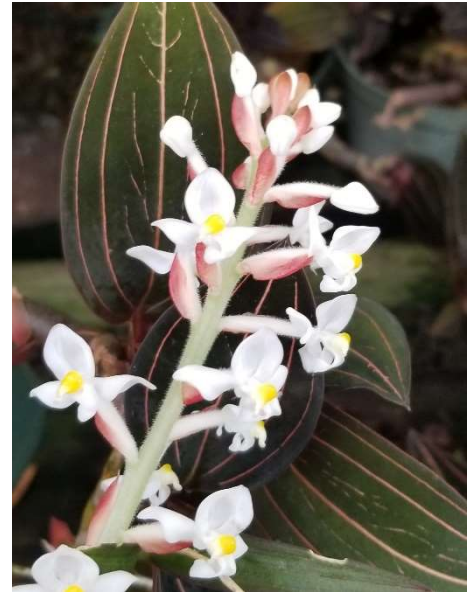
Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **BLOOMING IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, try in your landscape, or simply increase your horticultural knowledge!

## JEWEL ORCHID (*Ludisia discolor*)

Jewel orchid, unlike most orchids which grow on tree trunks is terrestrial, growing naturally on forest floors of Southeast Asia. Jewel Orchids prefer indirect light & need well-drained soil, usually a mixture of orchid bark, peat moss & perlite to mimic conditions in their native tropical forest habitat.

This easy orchid, often grown for its foliage, has striking dark maroon leaves with elegant pink veins creating a pinstripe effect appearing velvety at a distance. Tiny white flowers less than .5" across with a distinctive yellow throat appear on 4-6" tall stalks in winter, contrasting nicely with dark velvety foliage resembling velvet lining of a jewelry box.

This orchid has a cascading nature but plants rarely grow beyond 12" high or wide because the fragile pseudo-bulbs of this species easily break off if handled.



**See multiple examples of this unusual orchid currently blooming in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**

## HUISACHE OR SWEET ACACIA (*Vachellia farnesiana*)

Huisache is a small tree or large shrub found in South Texas' thorn scrub chaparral. Huisache typically grows 15-20' tall with multiple trunks giving it a large shrub form. Its fine compound leaves have been described as "fernline" with many leaflets less than .25" long.

Huisache is one of the first plants blooming in South Texas brushlands in spring, having just begun its burst of golden color for the year. In colder years, it's often delayed to late February or March. Small fragrant golden orange flowers about .5" across appear before leaves. The most visible part of the flower is a collection of stamen which gives it a fine, starburst or pom-pom effect. Once pollinated, reddish-brown beanlike structures 1.5-3" long appear. In southern Europe this species is extensively planted for the flowers, a perfume ingredient.



The common name, Huisache, comes from Nahuatl (Aztec) meaning "many thorns". It also goes by Texas Huisache, Sweet Acacia, Perfume Acacia, Mealy Acacia, Mealy Wattle & Cassie depending on location. This tree is a member of the Fabaceae (Pea/Bean) Family along with other woody native cousins: Honey Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), Texas Ebony (*Ebenopsis ebano*), Blackbrush (*Vachellia rigidula*) & Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*). It was formerly classified in the genus *Acacia* with scientific name *Acacia farnesiana* in older literature.

Rarely found in retail nurseries, Huisache is very drought tolerant but considered invasive by ranchers due to rapid growth & high seed germination rates.

**See several Huisache specimens along the Brennecke Nature Trail, and a large tree on the walkway to the Administration building.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of February 11, 2024)

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

## CALENDULA 'BON-BON YELLOW' (*Calendula officinalis*)

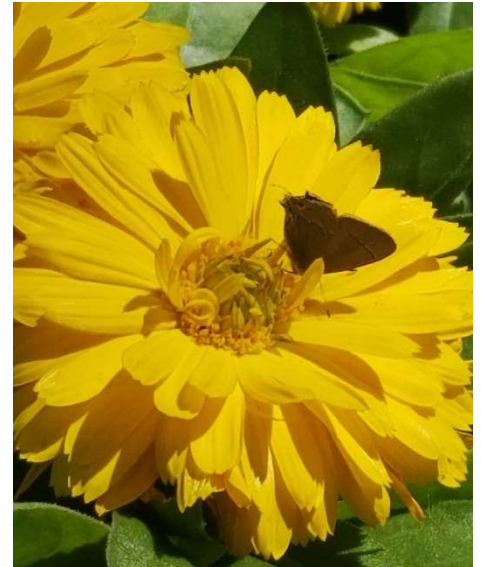
Calendulas are among the most consistent winter-flowering bedding plants! Believed to have originated in Southern Europe, later introduced in northern Europe & Americas, calendulas sometimes are called “English Marigolds” or “Pot Marigold”, for their round full yellow & orange flowers; but they are not close relatives of the traditional pungent marigold (*Tagetes* sp.)

The most commonly locally-sold variety is *Bon-Bon*, a compact plant readily reblooming with yellow or orange flowers 2-3” across. Plants have medium-sized simple grey-green leaves & grow 8-18” tall when flowering. Calendulas are members of the daisy/sunflower family (Asteraceae) with composite flowers, but a single blossom actually is a collection of tiny flowers grouped in a single inflorescence.

Calendulas can be started with seeds, but transplants are more popular in cooler months here, usually performing October - May. To increase new bud formation, remove spent blossoms (dead-head) regularly. Calendulas provide nectar for butterflies & hummingbirds, & pollen for bees in cooler months when other plants aren't flowering. They are also a larval plant for several moth species.

Homeopathically, Calendula flowers also are used medicinally for wounds, rashes, infection & inflammation, but strong evidence supporting these advantages is lacking, according to WebMD. Flower petals also were used in dyes & cosmetics in Ancient Greece & Rome.

**See Calendulas in the Butterfly Garden, Butterfly House & growing in beds between the Visitor Center & Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**



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

Agarita, aka Wild Currant, is showing bright yellow flowers starting to peak open with more consistent blooming expected the next few weeks in brushy areas of South Texas—another signal of spring approaching! Early bloom cycle is most striking when many branches have yellow flower clusters near the ends; but plants bloom sporadically later in spring. Unlike many native plants, it can be found at private retail garden centers.

Agarita has a wide range of common names (& spellings) depending on location including Agarito, Algerita, Laredo Mahonia, Laredo Oregon-grape & Trifoliate Barberry. This native member of the Barberry Family (Berberidaceae) is a common shrub in South Texas brushlands with a range stretching west to Arizona, dipping into Northern Mexico.

Agarita grows 3-8' tall, 3-4' wide. Known for gray-green, multi-pointed, trifoliate leaves resembling Christmas holly, this time of year flowers are the showstoppers with clusters of vibrant golden cup-shaped blossoms visible when most surrounding natives are still dormant. After pollination, flowers at maturity produce clusters of red berries eaten by birds & wildlife, which also can be harvested for jam, jelly or wine. Quail and small mammals also use the prickly-leaved plant for cover. Pioneers used the roots for yellow dye.



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

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of February 4, 2024)

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

## MEMORIA GORDON PETERS LADY SLIPPER ORCHID

(*Paphiopedilum* X 'Memoria Gordon Peters')

*Paphiopedilum* orchids, commonly called lady slipper orchids, have a unique pouch on the tongue petal with flowers soaring on a stalk above vegetative plants. Dark green, often speckled strap-like leaves provide more attractive foliage than many other orchid genera.

This week, we are featuring hybrid *Paphiopedilum* 'Memoria Gordon Peters' with striking long gold & maroon striped petals which look like twisted streamers around the lower lip petal that makes up the "slipper." Similarly colored sepals provide a cover and a backdrop for the slipper petal. This variety has smaller flowers about 4" across. Bright green leaves are about an inch wide, & 6-8" long. It was a cross of *Paphiopedilum* 'Julius Irving' & *P. philippinense*.



*Paphiopedilums*, native to South East Asia, are more terrestrial than many varieties, preferring more moisture. They are low-light orchids, the reason the American Orchid Society considers them well adapted as a houseplant treated similarly to African violets.

**See this lovely orchid & other *Paphiopedilums* blooming in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.**

## TANGLEWOOD, a.k.a. Desert Olive (*Forestiera pubescens*)

Tanglewood is a common native spineless understory plant of the South Texas Chaparral Thornscurb. This member of the olive family (Oleaceae) has several common names including Desert Olive, Stretchberry, Chaparral & Downy *Forestiera*. The most used common name here is Tanglewood coming from rapidly growing branches moving into existing trees & shrubs creating a "tangled" effect. Some call it Spring Herald or Spring Goldenglow since the flower appears early spring before leaves appear, ahead of most other communal plants. It also is called Elbowbush or Devi's Elbow with the 90° angle of new branches to the original stem.



If sweet perfume from seemingly bare, dormant plants gets your attention while walking through South Texas Brushlands in February or early March, then you might be smelling Tanglewood. This plant is one of the first bloomers to signal spring, and the flowers are easy to miss. Tiny flowers open along leafless branches. Each flower is only about .25" across & lacks obvious petals. This plant is dioecious, having male & 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. Bees & butterflies pollinate separated male & female plants.

When flowers are pollinated, small green fruit appear eventually maturing to a dark blue-black, which then are eaten by birds & small mammals. The rest of the year, it appears as a dense shrub that can grow to 10+ feet tall with dark green .75" long oval leaves usable as great visual screen in dry regions.

**To find Tanglewood, follow your nose & careful inspection along the Brennecke Nature Trail. Good luck in your aromatic explorations as we wait for spring in South Texas!**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

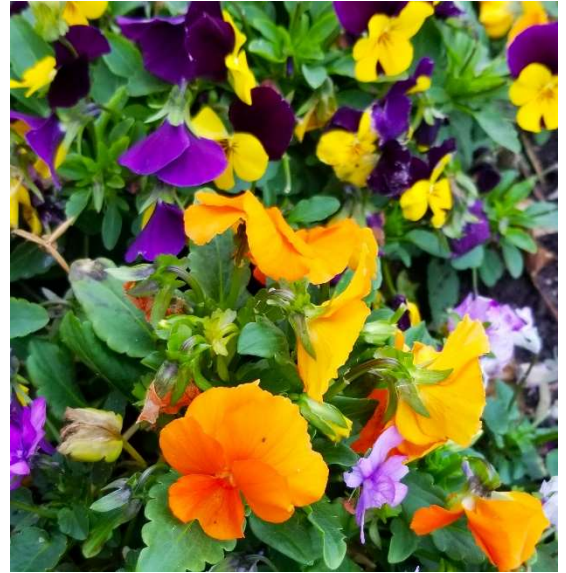
(week of January 28, 2024)

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

## VIOLA – SORBET MIX (*Viola odorata* 'Sorbet')

Violas are small flowering plants, commonly called “wood violet”, native to European & Asian woodlands introduced into the Americas & Australia. Other common names are sweet violet, English violet, common violet, florist’s violet, garden violet. Violas are essentially miniature pansies (*Viola tricolor* var. *hortensis*), both being in the Violet Family (Violaceae). Cool-season annuals in South Texas, Violas grow late Fall through mid-spring. As temperatures & sun intensity increases, plants decline.

‘Sorbet Mix’ only reaches 6-8” in height, the small rounded leaves a backdrop to a dazzling combinations of flower colors. ‘Sorbet Mix’ includes yellow, orange, white, lavender, dark purple & blue, plus multicolor blossoms with the classic pansy markings. Flowers are only .5-.75” wide, but plants are profuse bloomers, blossoms lasting multiple days quickly replaced with new flowers! Violas are another hardy annual that withstood recent mid-20s freeze.



Violas are edible flowers are used as garnish on salads, & living decorations on cakes & pastries. But it’s critical that pesticides are not applied to flowers used in salads!

**See them as short-term color in the Tropical Garden, and flower beds leading to & around the Butterfly House, as well as in combination container plantings.**

## COMMON GREENSHIELD LICHEN (*Flavoparmelia caperata*)

Lichens are common moss-like organisms living on tree trunks & rocks; unique in that lichens are symbiotic organisms made up of multiple species including fungus, algae or cyanobacteria & sometimes a yeast. Lichens are present on trees, rocks & even fences. They are not parasitic but epiphytic, not extracting moisture or moisture from trees, confirmed by their presence on non-living rocks & stones.

Greenshield lichens are part of the foliose lichen group which have leaf-like structures. But other lichen forms include crustiose lichens which look like scales on tree bark, & fruticose lichens with a lacy appearance.

The visible portion of the lichen is not a bloom but rather the vegetative structure present all year; making them more visible & colorful in winter months due to less surrounding vegetation & moisture. Common Greenshield Lichens have rounded leaflike structures ranging .5-1” tall. These lichens often appear to be a sheet with rounded, frilly edges. The leaf-like structures appear greener when wet & gray-green when dry.



**See common Greenshield Lichen on trees throughout the Botanical Gardens; but largest, nicest specimens are on trees along the highly accessible Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of January 21, 2024)

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

## STOCK 'HARMONY MIX' (*Matthiola incana*)

'Harmony Mix' Stock is an early-blooming, fragrant cool season annual many Coastal Bend gardeners overlook at garden centers. The florist industry uses tall-growing varieties of stock to add a spike of color along with its sweet perfume. Stock frequently is found in northern climate Victorian style cottage gardens. In South Texas, we use it as a cool season annual.

Semi-double blossoms with round petals start opening at the bottom of the thick bloom stalk with flower colors ranging from white to light pink, dark rose & shades of purple. Thick, medium green leaves provide a backdrop. Harmony is a dwarf variety, typically growing about 10" tall and spreading 6-8" across. Once the plant blooms out, cut the spent flower stalk a couple of inches above the ground & new growth & flowers should emerge.



Despite getting to 25°F earlier this week, these stock plants kept on blooming **without covering** during the cold snap, not surprising being a cold-hardy member of the cabbage family.

**See blooming Stock as winter color in the Tropical & Butterfly Gardens.**

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

Pink Mint appeared unphased by the week's freezing weather dipping to 25°F. It consistently is one of the first wildflowers to bloom even before spring weather returns. Pink Mint is in the Mint Family (Lamiaceae) along with salvias, coleus & many common culinary herbs.

Drummond's Pink Salvia produces multiple flower stalks featuring small lavender-pink tubular blossoms with white throats & lavender speckles, resembling many tubular flowers in the genus Salvia. At a distance, plants appear to be short mounds of light green foliage with lavender/pink flowers. Closer inspection shows simple, alternate oval heart-shaped leaves 1-2" long with slight serrations on the edge.

This annual only grows in cooler temperatures, dying out due to summer heat, but returning each November from seeds. After blooming which can linger through May, allow flowers to die back and left on plant to produce seeds for next year. It provides an important nectar source for winter hummingbirds and butterflies.



According to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Drummond's Pink Mint, a.k.a. Drummond's Hedge-nettle, is found only in Texas. It was named after noted Scottish naturalist Thomas Drummond who identified & collected plant samples in the Southwest U.S. & Northern Mexico in the 1830s, collecting more than 750 plant samples & identifying more than 150 birds.

**See it in the Butterfly Garden, Butterfly Hill & Hummingbird Garden, but also occurring naturally in smaller populations in other gardens & sunny spots along the Brennecke Nature Trail.**



# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of January 14, 2024)

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

## LAELIA NEMESIS ORCHID (*Laelia anceps* X *Laelia superbiens*)

This orchid is a primary hybrid--a cross of 2 naturally occurring species, *Laelia anceps* and *L. superbiens*. Introduced in 1902 by Crawshay, *Laelias* are native to Central America. These epiphytic orchids do not require traditional "soil" but attach themselves to trees and rocks.

The narrow lavender petals & sepals, bright yellow "throat" & dark purple lower lip of this orchid make a striking statement. The early hybrid has an extremely long flower stalk, often reaching 2-3' with 3-5 blossoms at the end of each stalk. Each blossom is 4-5" across, but looks smaller due to narrow petals & sepals. Tracing the flower stalk back to the pseudobulb will reveal the plant's thick gray-green leaf-like structures only about 6-8" tall.



Having been used in hybridizing due to their brilliant colors & durability, *Laelias* are referred to in parentage of species crosses particularly with *Cattleya* species, producing the new genus name, *Laeliocattleya*.

**See *L. Nemesis* in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory. Other orchids also still in bloom include cattleyas, paphiopedilums & dendrobiums.**

## FLUTED BIRD'S NEST FUNGUS (*Cyathus striatus*)

A closer look sometimes turns up an unusual find! During cooler winter months, many native plants don't bloom; but sometimes there are surprises.

For instance, the Striated Bird's Nest Fungus currently is producing its fruiting structures in rich organic material. We discovered this unusual fungus in a pot in the Butterfly House, where it is breaking down organic matter on the surface of the soil mix of a hibiscus plant; but likely more are present along our Nature Trail. Striated Bird's Nest Fungus is a saprophytic fungus, belonging to the largest group of macro-fungi responsible for breaking down & recycling dead plant & animal material.



The conical-shaped fungus actually is very small, only about an inch tall growing at the soil surface. So likely you'll miss them if not specifically looking. Once discovered, a close inspection shows the fungus looks amazingly like tiny beige bird's nests about .5" wide, most often found in clusters. In the center of each "nest" are round light gray structures resembling eggs, thus resulting in the common name of "bird's nest." With age, the "nest" structures turn darker brown. This species is also recognizable by the striations or flutes on the sides of the conical cups.

**Visit the Butterfly House and look in the hibiscus pots to view the fungus. (If it freezes this week as predicted, pots temporarily will be stored inside.)**

# BLOOMING IN THE GARDENS

(week of January 7, 2024)

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

## BIG BANG' EQUITANT ORCHID (*Tolumnia* Jairak Firm 'Big Bang')

Orchids come in all sizes and colors. One of the smallest orchids in our collection is a group formerly called Equitant Oncidium orchids, endemic to a few Caribbean basin islands. Leaves typically are 2-6" long within this group arranged in overlapping pairs at the base which inspired the name "equitant," from Latin meaning "riding a horse."

Small clusters of 2-6 flowers are common, emerging from a thin flower stalk so blossoms appear to hang in space! Colors range from browns to whites & purples. Jairak Firm 'Big Bang' are only about .5" wide with a large red lower lip petal & darker red petals & sepals behind with highlighting splashes of golden yellow.



Although 'Equitant' still is used by orchid aficionados, this orchid group now have their own genus, *Tomlumnia*. Most equitants only have been hybridized for the past half century, but even in that short time, there have been many crosses; so you will often see the genus simply followed by the hybrid name.

**See a late fall/winter bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory allowing visitors to not only view Equitants like 'Big Bang', but also multiple flowering Cattleya, Dendrobium & Paphiopedilum specimens.**

## COMMON DAY FLOWER (*Commelina erecta*)

Common Day Flower, or spiderwort, is a warm month wildflower. However, our warm fall & mild winter have these resilient flowers sporadically still blooming when other natives are temporarily dormant. This plant often is considered a weed but can be used as native groundcover. Part of its hardiness comes from a succulent underground tuber allowing it to store water living through the winter & surviving summer heat.

The three-petal flowers consist of 2 upper blue petals & a lower white "lip" petal resulting in an alternate common name, 'white-mouth dayflower'. Slightly fuzzy green leaves resemble wide grass blades about 1" wide & several inches long.



It probably is the most common member of the Spiderwort (Commelinaceae) Family which also includes Oyster Plant (*Rhoeo spathacea*), Purple Heart (*Tradescantia pallida*) & various trailing tropicals grown in hanging baskets under the umbrella name of "Wandering Jew." It is found in most of the continental U.S., particularly in the South. A vigorous grower, like other Commelina species, if growing in unwanted areas, needs to be dug, removing the central growing point attached to the fleshy, underground tuber.

**See Day flower along the nature trail, in the Butterfly Garden, in front of Education Station, as well as occasionally a few free-growing dayflowers in other beds, providing a surprise pop of color this winter & attracting overwintering butterflies on warm sunny days.**