

What is Blooming Now?

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It is serious hot out there but as is usually the case, there are plants blooming.

Poinciana (also called Pride of Barbados) gets the award for the showiest bloom right now. The glow-in-the-dark orange and yellow clusters are borne on airy stems of plants that are 4 to 7 feet tall. In addition to attracting our notice for their beauty, poinciana is a favorite nectar source for butterflies. Plants in full bloom are still available in area nurseries. They transplant easily, even in the heat. Water them in and provide an additional soaking once per week for the rest of the summer. They will bloom until Thanksgiving and then freeze back to the roots. Late next spring they will reappear and bloom again in the hottest part of the summer. Plant poinciana in full sun. After this first summer they will not require any irrigation. To encourage more blooms prune off the seed pods that form. Unfortunately deer will eat poinciana.

In second place as the showiest hot weather bloomer this year is the "Texas Gold" esperanza. It forms a thick crown of light green foliage that grows to about the same size as Poinciana. The bell-shaped blooms are yellow. It is another plant that can be purchased at the nursery in full bloom and can be transplanted without missing a day of bloom. In fact, one of the ways to insure that you are buying the superior "Texas Gold" selection is to pick a plant that is in bloom. "Texas Gold" is a blooming machine. Even transplants in one gallon containers will be blooming. Esperanza and poinciana work very well in joint plantings. Treat the new esperanza transplants exactly the same as described for poinciana. In most neighborhoods deer do not eat esperanza.

"New Gold" Lantana is blooming well. They are relatively low growing, spreading plants covered with small golden blooms, but they are aggressive and will grow up over other plants or even short fences. Hummingbirds and butterflies make use of lantana as a summer nectar source. They can still be purchased at area nurseries to provide blooms until Thanksgiving.

Other lantanas are also blooming, including the bushy upright native lantana with orange and yellow flowers. The lavender and white spreading lantanas are looking good in area nurseries, but their main bloom periods, once they are planted in the landscape, are the spring and fall. Some mild winters they will bloom far into the season long after "New Gold" has quit blooming. "New Gold" requires full sun, lavender and white spreading lantana bloom well in morning or partial sun. Deer do not eat lantana.

A few "New Gold" lantanas will not be blooming. If your "New Gold" is not blooming and the foliage appears dusty it is probably infected with lace bugs. Lace bugs are sucking insects that extract fluids from the lantana and temporarily end the bloom. To address lace bugs trim the lantana back with your string mower, spray with acephate, and apply one-half cup of slow release lawn fertilizer (such as 19-5-09) to the plant area. To prevent any attack by lace bugs next year apply the acephate on or about July 1 and then again on August 1.

The spreading lantanas make good summer groundcovers. They are very drought tolerant. Another plant that is blooming now makes even a better groundcover. Dwarf ruellia, also called dwarf Mexican

petunia, grows to about 1 foot tall with dark green thickly layered pointed foliage. Planted 18 inches apart they make an attractive solid groundcover in sun or shade. The flowers can be blue, pink or white depending on the selection. The plant is attractive enough to be used as a container plant for the foliage and bloom. Hummingbirds and butterflies are attracted to the blooms. The more sun that is available, the more blooms that are produced. Deer do not like ruellia but will eat at the plant in a drought.