

What is Blooming Now?

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The interest in attracting butterflies and hummingbirds to our landscapes encourages us to take more notice of nectar producing blooming plants 12 months of the year. Right now Mexican flame vine, duranta, cape honeysuckle, mist flower, and oxblood lily are blooming. In November fall aster and mint marigold will steal the show.

Mexican flame vine grows equally well on a 4ft. by 8 ft. trellis or as a mounding plant on the ground. It has bright orange silver-dollar sized blooms that cover the plant every autumn. It is a favorite butterfly nectar source.

Duranta forms a dense, weeping -shaped shrub 8 ft. tall and 6 ft. in diameter. In the fall it is covered with purple blooms that attract large numbers of butterflies. A white-flowered version is also available. The blooms are followed by yellow berries that are decorative but don't seem to be a favorite of the birds. Eventually they get eaten but are far down the list of favorite berries after pyracantha, hollies, ligustrum, and rose hips. Duranta is similar to esperanza in that some winters it freezes to the ground. It is easy to transplant and retail nurseries in San Antonio offer the plant in full bloom for planting now.

Cape honeysuckle has leaves and flowers that remind gardeners of a miniature trumpet creeper. It is a vigorous grower (but not as aggressive as trumpet creeper!) The small red flowers cover the eight ft. leaning stems every fall to provide color and a favorite nectar source for migrating hummingbirds. Cape honeysuckle freezes back to the ground most winters.

Gregg's mistflower is in full bloom now. In my landscape it vies with zinnias as being the favorite nectar source for monarchs, queens, painted ladies, gulf fritillaries, and swallowtails. The powdery blue flowers are attractive but the plant has a tendency to layover with any breeze or rain so it can't be described as a disciplined grower. Mistflower will freeze back to the roots in early winter but until then it will decorate the landscape with the blue flowers and the colorful butterflies that seek the nectar that the flowers provide. Obtain a mistflower in full bloom from the nursery and plant it in the garden to enjoy the butterflies this fall. It will sprout and spread next spring.

With all the rain we have received oxblood lily bloom stalks shot up as much as 18 inches tall with the 3 inch blood-colored lily at the end. They don't bloom long but are very showy. Unlike all the other plants described in this article, oxblood lily bulbs are not easy to find at your favorite nursery. The sources on the internet can be expensive. Once in the ground they spread quickly. If ever a gardening friend thins out his/her bed and offers you some of the bulbs, take them. They grow in full sun or shade and are very drought tolerant. Oxblood lilies qualify as a brief but spectacular fall blooming plant.

Fall aster won't bloom until late October but a mature plant in full bloom has the capacity to shift all attention in the landscape. The most spectacular plantings I have seen are mounds 8ft. in diameter and 3ft. high growing in full sun hotspots where the road and lawn intersect. Trim fall aster back with a string mower once/month until September and then let it expand and develop the flower buds. Unfortunately fall aster is eaten by the deer.

Mint marigold begins its short bloom period even later than fall aster but it has a similar impact and can be grown in the same manner. Instead of circular shaped mounds, mint marigold is usually grown in a rectangular bed in front of the house or lawn. And instead of lavender flowers, mint marigold has golden blooms. The plant has a strong anise fragrance which most gardeners find pleasant but discourages the deer from eating it.

Gardening Tour

The Gardening Volunteers of South Texas and the Gardening Conservancy are co-sponsoring a landscape tour today between 9am and 4pm. The tour includes a diverse set of 6 landscapes in Hill Country Village, Terrell Hills, San Antonio, Monte Viste, and Deerfield. SAWS customers can receive Rewards Program points for visiting the two designated Water Saver Landscapes. Tickets are \$7 for individual landscapes and \$36 for all six. Visit <https://gardeningvolunteers.org/yard-tours/> for more information.

For something different attend the "Insecta Fiesta" organized by the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension at the San Antonio Garden Center (3310 New Braunfels) on Thursday, November 2 at 6:30 -8:30 PM. The event promotes insects as a food source by incorporating them into a 4-course meal. Local chefs and a brewery help make the food palatable and the educational event fun! Call Agrilife for more info 210 631 0400.