

Woody Perennials for Hot Weather Blooms

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Occasionally we can have a rainy mild summer but most of the time it is hot and dry. Despite the weather there is a relatively large list of woody perennials that prosper and bloom in the San Antonio summer.

Esperanza is also called “yellow bells” because of its attractive yellow blooms. There are several esperanza selections on the market but, if your goal is blooms, “Gold Star” is by far the best. “Gold Star” is a blooming machine, even the smallest transplants at the nursery should have blooms on them. Other selections may not bloom until early fall with small blooms only at the top of the plant.

Esperanza freezes back to the ground each winter and then grows to 7 or 8 feet tall each summer. Grow them in full sun. Once the plant is established (one summer) they do not require supplemental irrigation to prosper or bloom.

The plant has an upright growth habit with attractive light green foliage in addition to the flowers. Deer, in most situations, do not eat esperanza. It is the egg-laying site for the gray hairstreak butterfly, and a regular nectar source for hummingbirds.

Poinciana or pride of Barbados freezes back each winter and grows to about the same size as esperanza. The flowers are produced in orange and yellow clusters above a structure of small leaflets arranged in airy layers. The blooms seem to glow with color. Poinciana is just as drought tolerant as esperanza. The two species are often planted together in shrub borders or parking lot islands. Deer are more likely to eat poinciana but may not do so except in deep drought. Butterflies use poinciana as a nectar source.

Thryallis is another yellow blooming plant that is not eaten by deer. The small but numerous yellow flowers are produced on the stems at the top of the 6-7ft. shrub. Thryallis freezes back to the ground most winters but is more cold hardy than esperanza and poinciana. Use thryallis in full sun for the showy summer blooms that provide nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies.

Firebush has red tubular blooms that decorate the stems. It can be used as a 6ft. tall blooming plant for summer color on a hot, dry planting site with unimproved soils, but I like it best in a container on the patio. In a 20-inch container it grows to form a compact globe 2-foot-tall and 2 feet in diameter. The new foliage is red. In my experience, there is no better plant to attract the fall migrating hummingbirds to your patio. The aggressive dynamos will compete for the nectar from the firebush blooms. Later in the fall the firebush foliage turns a showy maroon before the leaves fall.

Blue plumbago froze back to the ground this winter but usually it doesn't. Some mild winters it will bloom far into the season and keep its foliage all winter. Plumbago has light blue, quarter size blooms that are produced on a sprawley plant that grows well in the sun or shade. There are reports that the plant is not eaten by deer in some neighborhoods, but I would experiment with a small planting before you invest in a large planting. In my neighborhood, the deer eat plumbago.

Mealy blue sage and Mexican bush sage also produce blue flowers, but they are reliably deer proof. There are many selections from which to choose, including disciplined 18-inch Victoria blue soldiers to

use in a flower bed border or the 7 feet tall and wide indigo spires hybrid that fills whatever space in full sun that you allow it. The summer blue salvias are favorite nectar sources for hummingbirds and butterflies and are very drought tolerant. They freeze back to the roots every winter but will be back in bloom by May in the landscape.