**Weekly Express-News Article**

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Saturday, July 14, 2012

**“Blooming Shrubs for Full Sun”**

Despite the heat there are a number of shrubs that are blooming in San Antonio area landscapes. In addition to tolerating the heat, these container-grown plants can be transplanted through the summer.

Gold Star Esperanza is the shrub with attractive light green foliage and half-dollar size, bell shaped yellow flowers. Notice that I specify “Gold Star”. “Gold Star” is the selection that blooms most of the summer beginning in May on plants that are as small as two feet tall. If you have an older selection, it is probably not blooming yet and will only have a limited number of blooms at the top of the plant when it reaches seven or eight feet tall. “Gold Star” also has larger blooms.

Esperanza is very drought tolerant. Grow it in full sun. To maintain a steady bloom, cut off seedpods as they form. Esperanza is deer proof in most neighborhoods. In cold winters it dies back to the roots but is root hardy and begins growth again in April. Hummingbirds use esperanza as a nectar source.

Poinciana is also called “Pride of Barbados”. It is just as drought tolerant as esperanza and is even more likely to freeze back to the roots than esperanza. Poinciana has very showy glow-in-the-dark orange-red and yellow blooms. The blooms appear as rounded flat clusters above the airy foliage. Poinciana and esperanza are very compatible for joint plantings in hot dry places like a parking lot island.

Butterflies and hummingbirds use poinciana as a nectar source but deer will eat the plant.

Duranta has a weeping growth habit. Like poinciana and esperanza it will grow seven to eight feet tall after freezing back to the roots in the winter. It becomes four to six feet in diameter.

Duranta has peduncular blooms of purple or white. The blooms are followed by yellow berries that eventually get consumed by the birds as the winter progresses. Duranta is a favorite butterfly nectar source. I was introduced to the plant when my neighbor’s duranta was covered by Monarch butterflies in late summer one year. It was a spectacular show. Deer will eat duranta.

Firebush is another sun loving, drought tolerant shrub that can be planted now. It produces small red tubular blooms that cover the shrub. In a container the plant will form a two-and-a-half feet tall and wide, round shrub. In the garden, it will grow to seven feet tall.

Firebush has an upright growth habit, much like esperanza. It fits well in plantings with poinciana and esperanza and is even more popular with hummingbirds than those two plants. Plant firebush in a five-gallon container on a sunny patio and it will attract the toughest hummingbird in the area in addition to making an attractive show.

Firebush has reddish foliage that turns purple-red in the fall after the first cold-wave moves through the area. The plant freezes back to the roots each winter. Unfortunately, deer will eat the new growth and stems.

Lantana is available in several selections with different growth habits and flower colors. “New Gold” and lavender are low growing spreading selections. “New Gold” is very aggressive. Lavender is available in both lavender and white. Neither color version will cover as much ground as “New Gold” or bloom as aggressively in the summer. Both, however bloom longer into the winter and have more shade tolerance than “New Gold”.

There are many upright lantanas. The native version has cream and pink flowers.

Other selections are hybrids with flowers of red and orange, and orange and cream.

Lantanas are not eaten by deer and provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds. Except for the lavender spreading species most die back to the roots each winter.

Plants that die back each winter require pruning out the dead top in the spring to maintain a neat landscape.

If you live in a neighborhood with deer, it is a good idea to apply a product such as Liquid Fence to newly planted perennials and shrubs, even if they appear on the deer proof list. Deer are curious and will taste and/or pull up plants in their habitat as new ones are planted. Apply the smelly material once a week for three weeks to give them a chance to settle in without deer interference.