

What is Blooming Now?

Distribute 11-7- 2019

The zinnias, vincas, and other warm weather annuals were affected by the weather in the low 30's that we experienced 2 weeks ago but some are still blooming. With the cool weather though, it is time to plant snapdragons, pansies, cyclamen, primula, stocks, dianthus, alyssum, calendulas and other cool weather annuals. In the meantime, a number of perennials are providing attractive blooms and meeting the needs of the butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators for nectar.

Duranta has blue or white flowers followed by yellow berries. The flowers are noticeable but the main reason that duranta will attract your attention is that most will be covered by Monarch and Queen butterflies. You can also expect the migrating hummingbirds to alternate between your sugar water feeders and the blooms. Duranta are a favorite nectar source for pollinators in the fall. Plant clumps of duranta to provide cover for wildlife in addition to the nectar. They grow to about 7 feet in our environment, surviving some winters but usually freezing back to the roots. It is in the same league as esperanza and poinciana in growth and cold tolerance, but its bloom peak is late fall rather than the summer. The berries are eventually consumed by the birds, but they don't seem to be in the same league as pyracantha or holly. Expect them to decorate the bush until early spring.

Mexican Flame Vine is another fall blooming perennial that rates high on the favorite nectar producing list. The vine works well on a trellis or fence but can also be grown as a fall blooming groundcover. The showy orange red blooms are especially attractive spilling over a bank or wall. Expect Mexican flame vine to freeze back to the roots every winter and return with growth starting in late spring.

Fall aster is also called Michaelmas daisy and Christmas aster. My favorite use of the plant is where it is trained by pruning once per month until September as a mound and eventually grows to 8 feet in diameter and 2.5 to 3 feet tall. For a short period in the fall it is covered with lavender blooms that are so showy that it can change the whole focal point in the landscape. The best place to grow fall aster is in full sun in a dry hot setting like on the boulevard where it is surrounded by asphalt and sidewalks. If it is not trained as the described mound, fall aster is prone to be irregular shaped and flop over in the wind and rain. Deer will eat fall aster, so the planting site must be selected to avoid their browsing.

Mint marigold has a short bloom period just like fall aster and it blooms even later in the fall. It also freezes back to the roots in the winter. Like fall aster the plants form mounds but in the case of mint marigold, the mounds are covered with golden blooms instead of lavender flowers. European honeybees and native bees make good use of the blooms as a nectar source. Mint marigold has an advantage over fall aster in that the deer don't eat the plant. It has a pleasant but strong smell of anise (licorice).

Among the largest plants blooming this fall is coral vine. Also called queen's crown, it is a vine that in some situations grows over shade trees and often over whole buildings. It is covered with small pink flowers that rates highest of all the plants described in its attractiveness to bees and other pollinators. I

believe that in the case of coral vine, despite its beautiful bloom, we are lucky that it is cold sensitive. If it didn't die back every winter, it would overwhelm our landscapes.