

Hot Weather Annuals

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Your snapdragons finished with a flourish, but they are probably now showing fungal rust symptoms and will decline quickly. Stocks, cyclamen, primula and calendula are also declining in the warming weather. It is time to replace the cool weather annuals with the hot weather plants.

In full sun select from zinnias, cosmos, moss roses and purslane. For the shade penta, begonia, caladium, and coleus are colorful plants to use.

There are several zinnias varieties from which to choose. The most popular zinnia (zinnia elegans) for use in San Antonio gardens produces colorful blooms that make good cut flowers. They also are one of the best nectar sources for butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators. If you allow them to go to seed the cardinals, goldfinches and other seed eaters feast on the seed. Plant zinnia as transplants or by seed. Dreamland zinnia, a popular selection offers compact 4-inch blooms in yellow, red, orange, pink, and off-white on 16-inch plants. For containers there are also Lilliput and Thumbelina selections. Zinnia elegans selections with smaller plants and blooms. For a taller zinnia plant California Giant or Cactus by seed.

The Profusion zinnia is available in at least 5 flower colors, (pink, yellow, orange, red, and white). It grows to 18 inches tall and is more drought tolerant and disease resistant than the showier zinnia elegans. Zinnia linearis is even more hardy with 1.5-inch yellow and orange blooms.

Cosmos is sometimes available as a transplant, but many gardeners grow them from seed. The daisy-like flowers are available in many colors but the gold and yellow are the most popular. They are not a disciplined plant and are not usually planted in rows. They are often planted in the field where wildflowers grow in the spring to fill the summer gap. They can be used for cutting flowers and are a popular nectar source for butterflies.

Moss roses and purslane are low growing plants with bright colored flowers that are especially suitable for containers in full sun. The foliage is attractive with the look of a succulent and they are, in fact, very drought tolerant. A common issue with moss rose and purslane is that the daily bloom period often begins in late morning and ends in late afternoon. If you have a long workday you may miss their showy blooms.

In the shade consider penta. They are available at area nurseries in full bloom and will stay in bloom until the cold weather arrives next winter. The flowers are available in red, lavender, pink and white in several sizes. I like the selection that grows to about 14 inches tall. Pentas are a disciplined grower that makes a superior container plant. It is readily used by hummingbirds and butterflies as a nectar source.

Semperflorens (wax) begonia is another excellent choice for containers and beds in the shade. There are 3 leaf colors and 3 bloom colors from which to choose. Begonias have a fragile look, but they are quite drought tolerant and will often even survive the winter. The Whopper Begonia is a close relative of the semperflorens version, but the leaves, blooms, and plant size are 3 to 4 times as large. They are very showy and nearly as tough as their smaller relatives.

Caladium and coleus are colorful foliage plants that are good sources of color for the summer shade garden. Both plants offer dark maroon foliages and versions with showy patterns of green and silver. Caladium is a bulb does an excellent job if you are seeking a disciplined display of uniform plants.