**Fall Blooming Perennials that can be Planted Now**

**Primetime News**

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Consider firebush, cape honeysuckle, and firespike for the blooms they provide in the fall and for the ability they have to attract hummingbirds.

Firebush is a prominent part of most xeriscape landscape plans that are prepared in the San Antonio area. It is a root hardy perennial that dies back to the roots each winter and then reappears in late spring to grow to 4 to 5 feet tall. Firebush foliage starts out red-green and maintains it red hue until the fall. After the first cold wave, the foliage turns a purple-red. Blooming begins in early July and lasts until cold weather arrives.

The flowers are small, red and tubular. The blooms are showy, but firebush is especially desirable because of its attraction to hummingbirds. During the fall migration if you have a firebush on your patio or in your shrub border, expect it to be the center of many hummingbird dogfights. The toughest hummingbird in the area ends up in possession of the firebush, but only until a tougher migrating bird shows up to do battle.

In a 3-gallon container, firebush grows to about 2.5 feet tall and wide. The limited soil reservoir makes the plant very manageable but also reduces its drought tolerance. Expect to water a firebush on the patio as much as your hibiscus. The hummingbird action is worth it. If you have a sunny patio, pick up at least one firebush in a container now.

Cape honeysuckle is not really a honeysuckle; its Latin name is Tecoma capensis. It evolved in the Southern Hemisphere, South Africa, but is a longtime favorite plant for Texas landscapes.

The cape honeysuckle’s flower and leaves remind area gardeners of trumpet creepers but in a miniature and less aggressive form. Because of its Southern Hemisphere origins, it wants to bloom in the fall and winter here in Texas.

Grow cape honeysuckle in full sun on a trellis or against a wall or fence. It is a leaning vine rather than a grasping or twining vine. The stems are stiff enough that it can be trained as a shrub. It will grow to 10 feet tall. The flowers are quarter size and tubular. They are usually orange but there is a yellow version in South Africa. As one would suspect looking at the flowers, they are a favorite nectar source for the hummingbirds in the fall.

Cape honeysuckle defoliates every winter and dies back to the roots during cold winters.

Firespike (Odontonema strictum) has dark green, shiny foliage. With the attractive foliage and extreme shade tolerance, it is often used as a house plant. Outside in a container or in a sheltered spot in the shrub border, firespike will produce red tubular flowers on tall spikes above the lush foliage every autumn until cold weather arrives in November.

The red flowers are showy and a favorite of hummingbirds as a nectar source. Place it in a decorative container on a shady patio and it has the same hummingbird attraction power that firebush has in full sun.

Firespike in containers can be moved to a greenhouse or even into the house for cold protection. Plants left outside freeze to the ground most winters to return in early summer. They will grow to 5 feet tall in a growing season on most sites. In warm micro-climates like the Riverwalk, firespike can grow to 8 or 10 feet tall.

**Garden Tasks**

The purple martins have left their houses to move to their assembly points prior to migrating south for the winter. The houses can be lowered and cleaned out to prepare them for the winter.

If you haven’t cut back the blackberry vines that produced the crop this year, now is a good time to do it. Next year’s crop will be produced on the new vines that grow.

Plant your fall tomatoes as soon as temperatures fall but before the end of August. Consider using heat setters such as Solar Fire, Tycoon, Tygress, Phoenix, BHN 968 or Surefire.

Apply a pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze for grasses and Portrait for broadleaf weeds this month or early in September.