Texas Superstars for Full Sun

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Several weeks ago we discussed two new Texas Superstars for 2016- “Whopper begonia”, and “Brazilian Red Hots Alternanthera”. The “Whopper” and “Red Hots” were new plants to consider for the shade. Here are some past Texas Superstars that are worthy of consideration for the sunny part of your summer landscape.

**Laura Bush petunia** was selected as a Superstar because it is a fast growing, spreading plant with attractive pink or violet blooms. Additionally it is more heat tolerant than most other petunias. If it is planted now it will bloom strongly until July, hang on through the summer and then renew itself for a long bloom period through the fall and into the winter.

 If we had a winter like this year it will bloom through the winter. If we have a cold spell in January and the plants freeze back, expect it to reseed. New plants will germinate in the spring. In my landscape Laura Bush petunias have naturalized in containers and raised beds among the satsumas and lemons. Laura Bush petunias also do well in hanging baskets. Plant them in full sun.

Another Texas Superstar that prospers in full sun is the **Cora vinca**. It is available with red, pink, violet and white blooms. For years vinca was the favorite summer annual flower and then it became overrun with a fungal disease, aerial phytophera. The prevalence of the disease made it necessary to limit vinca planting until June and even then you could expect the disease to attack if the temperatures cooled and moisture sat on the foliage.

The introduction of Cora vinca greatly reduced the threat of aerial phytophera. Now we can plant vincas in April or May and expect them to survive cool, rainy spells and foliage wetting. Cora is blooming when you obtain transplants from the nursery and blooms every day until cold weather arrives about Thanksgiving.

Cora vincas are very drought tolerant. Grow it in a container or garden bed in full sun. It is a favorite nectar source for butterflies. Deer do not eat vinca. There is a spreading version of Cora vinca called Cascade that has the disease resistance of Cora and makes an excellent plant for hanging baskets.

The Texas Superstar**, Angelonia** is also called summer snapdragon. It is an annual flower that grows to 18 inches tall with white, pink, lavender, or purple flowers. It is drought tolerant and in most neighborhoods escapes being eaten by the deer. The flowers are not striking as vinca or Laura Bush petunias but the plant is effective in a mass planting or as a border. Angelonia is also used as a ground cover and in hanging baskets.

There are several blue summer salvias that have been designated as Texas Superstars for their attractive blooms, drought tolerance, pest resistance and the fact that deer do not eat them. They all freeze back to the roots in the winter to return in the spring for a long blooming season. All of the summer salvias provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds. Choose from among Mexican Bush Sage, Henry Duelberg Salvia, and Mystic Spires Blue Salvia. Grow all of the blue salvias in full sun.

**Mexican Blue Sage** grows to 4 ft. tall and 3 ft. wide. The blooms are purple with some white borne on long spikes that make good cut flowers.

**Henry Duelberg Salvia** grows to about the same size as Mexican Blue Sage but has more of a sprawling growth habit and blue flowers.

**Mystic Spires Blue Salvia** is a hybrid salvia that grows to 30 inches tall. It has blue flowers.