What is Blooming Now?

Distribute 08-11-2016

Despite the heat and lack of rain there are a number of landscape plants noticeable in area landscapes because of their blooms.

A shrub making an impression with its pink/blue blooms is ceniza. In some settings we notice the silver foliage but now with it blooming, the drought tolerant native shrubs seem to be everywhere. Ceniza’s bloom is related to rain events, the debate is whether they bloom before it is going to rain or if it blooms after it has rained. My radio colleague Milton Glueck is convinced that ceniza bloom predicts rainfall. We can only hope he is right. We need the rain and they are blooming all over San Antonio.

Ceniza is also called Texas sage. In addition to its attractive but unpredictable bloom pattern, ceniza is a desirable addition to a low water landscapes because of its drought tolerance, freedom from pests and deer-proof status. Ceniza is also an unusual native plant in that it can be hedged at 4 to 6 feet tall like boxwood. Grow ceniza in full sun in well-drained soil. Soggy soil and long wet periods can kill ceniza.

Another shrub that is blooming well in the dry hot weather is oleander. It is producing blooms of pink, red, and white on stems that arise from the root system at the plant base and reach 4 to 10 feet, depending on the selection. Oleander has lost favor because of an epidemic of bacterial infections called leaf scorch spread by sharpshooter insects that has caused stem dieback and plant death to widespread roadside and landscape plantings. Extensive research has not answered all the questions about the infection so it is not recommended that new ones be planted. Enjoy the blooms on the existing plants in full sun plantings on dry sites in San Antonio neighborhoods and hope that researchers figure out what can be done to control oleander leaf scorch.

Poinciana is the six to eight foot airy plant growing topped by a layer of glow-in-the dark orange and yellow blooms. It is also called pride of Barbados In addition to making a spectacular show for human viewing, the poinciana are a favorite nectar source for butterflies and hummingbirds. Nurseries offer poinciana plants in containers for planting now. They will bloom for several more weeks especially if you remove the forming seed pods. In the fall poinciana die back to the roots until late spring when they grow new stems. Grow them in full sun.

Bougainvillea are cyclical bloomers (alternate between on and off bloom) but they are in cycle right now and are making quite a show on patios in full sun. The thorny stems are covered with pink, red, lavender, and even off-white blooms. Bougainvillea plants usually do best in our area if they are grown in containers such as hanging baskets so they can become quickly root bound and water can be controlled. A near-perfect system seems to be a 36 inch diameter plant grown in a 12 inch container. Place it in full sun and only provide water when the container dries to 1 inch deep. Reaching the point of wilting is not a problem with bougainvillea. If you water too frequently, expect the plant to quit blooming. Bougainvillea will also quit blooming if the plant is placed in the ground or potted up in a larger container where the plant will concentrate on growing new roots rather than blooms.