What is Blooming Now?

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With the above average amounts of rain and cooling temperatures there are lots of blooms to admire in the landscape this fall. Among those that are making a show are cape honeysuckle, blood lilies, Mexican olive, sky flower, firebush, and mistflower.

Cape honeysuckle (Tecoma capensis) is described by many gardeners as a vine but it is more of a “leaner”. The plant sends up 10 to 12 feet stems and side shoots with leaves that resemble miniature trumpet creeper foliage. The tubular, orange blooms also resemble trumpet creeper blooms but they are only about one inch long. There are lots of blooms on the stem and are a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds. Grow cape honeysuckle in full-sun against a fence or wall. It works as a free-standing shrub as long as you are willing to be a conscientious pruner.

Oxblood lilies (Rhodophiala bifada) only grow to 1 foot tall and the red blooms only last a week but they make a spectacular temporary show that draws the attention of anyone who is lucky enough to come across them in the landscape. As the bed matures the plants become thicker and thicker. They are long lived drought tolerant bulbs that often end up hidden in secluded beds as larger plants grow up and around them. Oxblood lilies are not easy to obtain. You can find them on the internet at high prices or you may be lucky enough to receive a few as a gift from a fellow gardener who is thinning her bed.

Mexican olive (Cordia boissieri) is a small tree (to 25 feet) that has large oval furry leaves and produces white blooms that resemble althea. Unlike althea, however the Mexican olive is sturdy and drought tolerant. In my neighborhood it has naturalized and appears to be passed up by the deer. Those that grow in open areas have an attractive round crown that is covered with blooms for much of the growing season. The blooms serve as a nectar source for butterflies and hummingbirds. The nickel-size round fruit resemble olives but are moisture full and decompose quickly when they fall. Mexican olive is somewhat cold sensitive. Some winters when temperatures fall to 24 degrees plants in the open may freeze back to the roots. The good news is that they grow back very quickly.

Blue sky flower (Thunbergia grandiflora) is a vine with 3 inch wide tubular blue blooms which freeze back each winter but can easily grow to cover an 8 feet tall 30 ft. stretch of fence in late summer and fall. Combined with oxblood lily and Mexican olive, sky vine blooms make an impressive red, white and blue display. It is late for the 4th of July Celebration but if you are lucky enough to see it, you won’t forget.

Firebush (Hamelia patens) is at is showy best right now. The sewing needle-shaped and sized red blooms cover the red-green foliage on 7feet tall plants in the garden and 3feet globe-shaped plants in containers much to the delight of the migrating hummingbirds. The toughest bird on the block takes possession of the firebush blooms and their rich nectar. It is not too late to purchase a blooming firebush from your favorite nursery and set the container on the patio. The birds will find it.

The firebush is the favorite hummingbird plant right now. For butterflies it is hard not to award the distinction to the mistflower (Eupatorium sp.). The3 ft. tall mounding plant is covered with blue or white blooms that do resemble a misty coating. As impressive as the blooms, however, are the butterflies that seem to cover the blooms from one end to the other end of the plant. Queens, swallowtails, sulfurs, and now Monarchs are dominant. Grow mistflower in full sun. Other blooms that are attracting butterflies right now are milkweed, porterweed, zinnias, sunflower, lantana, salvia, and horseherb.