

## What is Blooming Now?

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If you compare the blooms that are prevalent in area landscapes this year to the same time last year, the variety and quantity of color is considerably different. The whole month of January was cold in 2018 with the result that it both reduced the number of blooming plants and delayed plants that we would expect to bloom earlier.

Most years we list paperwhites as blooming plants that would be producing color early in January. They look good now with their lush green foliage and numerous white blooms, but they are blooming late. Paperwhites can be grown in full sun or partial shade. They readily naturalize and are considered a Xeriscape plant. You can purchase paperwhite bulbs at most nurseries or on the internet. In my experience many of the naturalized clumps originated as forced bulbs received by a family for a Christmas gift. After the flowers decline in the container, plant them in the shrub border at the edge of the lawn.

Paperwhites are well-known for their fragrance! It is very strong and, I believe it is better suited for outside than in the house. Nearly all selections of paperwhites will naturalize. They are closely related to daffodils but only a few of the yellow-flowered daffodils will naturalize. Seek out the selections Campernelle, Trevithian, or Golden Scepter for a yellow daffodil that will naturalize. All the paperwhites and daffodils are “deer-proof”. The foliage must be allowed to naturally decline to brown each spring after the blooms fade to replenish the bulbs.

The redbuds are also blooming. Most gardeners only notice them at this time of the year when they are in bloom. The rest of the time they are inconspicuous as understory trees on the edge of forested areas or under our shade trees. You have several choices of redbud selections, if you plant the Texas or Oklahoma versions, they do very well as part of a xeriscape landscape in San Antonio. They are the selections that have relatively small waxy leaves and excellent drought tolerance. The Eastern redbud has larger dull colored leaves. Some survive in the area but may defoliate during a droughty period. The Forest Pansy selection has attractive purplish leaves, but it has even more trouble surviving our soils and hot weather. Redbuds will grow to 30 feet tall with considerable shade tolerance.

Primrose jasmine has a quarter-size waxy yellow bloom that is borne on a weeping shaped evergreen shrub that will grow to 10 feet tall and 15 feet in diameter. They are extensively used in neighborhoods with deer for shrub borders and hedges. The plant does not seem to have any pests that bother it although sometimes in my neighborhood it wilts in drought.

Paperwhites are late to bloom this year and so are cemetery iris. Recognize this long-lived drought tolerant and deer-proof plant by its sword-like foliage and white blooms. Use cemetery iris in full sun for an attractive, tough groundcover that provides blooms late every winter. The plants are not fussy about soil except that it can not be soggy. The rhizomes are planted so that the top of the rhizome is level with the soil surface. Iris are one of the few plants that does better without mulch. The rhizomes are available from some nurseries, but most gardeners obtain their initial batch from a neighbor or friend that is thinning their bed. A second early blooming iris is the “blue flag”. Most of us also call “blue

flag” the cemetery iris because it is just as likely to have survived for many years in untended beds at old cemeteries or homesteads as the white version.

In addition to the plants above that are blooming, some of the cyclamen, primula, dianthus, and calendulas are providing color in containers and flower beds. Snapdragons, stocks, and petunias all lost their blooms to the cold weather, but the snapdragons are showing new flower buds and should start a spring bloom period within a few weeks.

#### Tomato and Vegetable Class

Learn how to plant and care for a spring vegetable garden by attending a free class by Dr. Calvin Finch sponsored by the Dreamhill Estates Neighborhood and Milberger’s Nursery on March 10 from 9:30-10:30am at 6800 Dorothy Louise Drive. All attendees will receive a free tomato plant. Dorothy Louise Dr. intersects Babcock w of Loop 410 in the Medical Center.