

## What is Blooming Now?

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One of the showiest blooms that is prominent right now is that of the pomegranate. It is the shrub, usually many stemmed and 12-14 feet tall, that is covered with 3-inch multi-layered orange flowers. I say "usually" because there are many selections of pomegranate. The most common version is the variety, "Wonderful," in addition to producing the blooms on a large shrub, it will produce baseball sized fruit that is used for nutritious drinks and recipes. There are at least 10 other fruit producing pomegranate selections and nearly as many ornamental varieties.

Pomegranates will produce blooms through May. In my neighborhood, the deer do not eat pomegranate, so the plant has naturalized throughout the area. It survives in some shade but blooms and produces fruit best in full sun. Pomegranate is one of those fruits for our landscapes that does not require irrigation or pesticide sprays to prosper. The plant is thick enough that birds will use it for cover and nesting sites.

The Monarch butterflies are visiting San Antonio. If they find milkweed foliage they will lay their eggs on the plants to produce a new generation to migrate further north. The cold weather in January set the milkweed back a few weeks, but enough of the tropical, and native milkweeds such as *Asclepias texana*, are producing foliage to accommodate them. In terms of nectar sources, the tropical milkweed is producing its orange and yellow flowers for their use and our appreciation. As we progress through May and the milkweed flowers become showier, the Monarchs will move north, and the Queen butterflies will replace them to harvest the nectar and lay their eggs on the foliage.

Several of the wildflowers are very attractive now. Bluebonnets, poppies, coreopsis, phlox, winecups, and primrose are obvious. Another wildflower, blue curl (*Phacelia*) is also blooming and is especially obvious because of its attraction to butterflies and bees. Blue curl is a 3-foot-tall plant that has lavender blue bloom shaped like a caterpillar. It is also called snail weed by some gardeners because of the shape of its flower. Blue curl is an exceptional wildflower because of its long bloom period, its attractiveness to pollinators, and the fact that it blooms in sun or shade. Collect its seed from the field or find a supplier on the internet to produce a crop next year.

Every year at this time gardeners are faced with the dilemma of deciding between the last hurrah of the blooms of the winter snapdragons and the new blooms of the summer zinnia in the cut-flower garden. Both are blooming now. Snapdragons are very showy, especially if you have the large-sized variety, "Rockets". The red, yellow, white, lavender, pink, blue and orange blooms on the 3-foot stalks are hard to match. With the hot weather though, the snapdragons will contract the fungal rust disease and decline quickly.

If you grew zinnias last year they have reseeded in many gardens so are already blooming. To supplement the naturalized zinnias, obtain Dreamland transplants from your favorite nursery to fill in the space that will be available when the snapdragons decline. Also consider California Giants and Cactus selections to grow by seed. Zinnias are very showy in the full sun garden, they make excellent cut flowers, are one of the favorite butterfly and hummingbird nectar sources, and provide seed for the cardinals, goldfinches and other seed-eaters if you let them proceed to the point of dropping their seed.