

## What is Blooming Now?

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The inventory of plants that is blooming now is important for those of us that want to have flowers blooming 12 months of the year. It is also very important for the fall migrating hummingbirds and butterflies. The butterfly populations are at their peak, including the Monarchs that are taking a break in San Antonio on their way to the wintering grounds near Mexico City.

Zinnias are in their last month of bloom, but they still look good and are hosting giant swallowtails, pipevine swallowtails, bordered patch, gulf fritillary, queens, black swallowtails, sulfurs and other species in addition to the Monarchs. In addition to their role as a favorite butterfly host, use the zinnias for cut flowers.

Another showy plant that is a popular nectar source that is blooming now, is *duranta*. Based on communications from other gardeners some think that the *duranta* is more popular with the Monarchs than zinnias. I vote for the zinnias but the *duranta* is certainly popular with butterflies. *Duranta* grows to about 8 feet tall with light green leaves and purple/blue flowers arranged on weeping stems. They freeze back in the manner of *esperanza* in cold winters but are more cold hardy than *thryallis*, *poinciana*, and *esperanza* in my neighborhood. *Duranta* is available in bloom at area nurseries and can be planted now.

Cape honeysuckle looks more like a miniature trumpet vine than a "honeysuckle". It has long stems that will lean over a trellis or fence in the manner of a vine. The tubular, one-inch flowers are orange/red and a favorite nectar source for the migrating hummingbirds. Cape honeysuckle blooms until the first freeze when it dies back to the roots. They emerge again in the spring to bloom in the in the late summer and fall.

There are several *Salvias* blooming now. All are deer-proof and drought tolerant.

Autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*) is shrub version that does not freeze back each winter. The most common flower color is pink, but the flowers can be white, red, salmon, or lavender. It is a popular landscape plant because of its fall and spring blooming, it's drought tolerance and the fact that the deer do not eat it. In addition to providing decorative flowers in many San Antonio landscapes, blooming specimens are available for planting at area nurseries.

*Salvia coccinea* is a red flowered *salvia* that is part of most wildflower mixes because of its attractive flowers, its shade tolerance, and its fall blooming habit. One version of *Salvia coccinea* with pink and white blooms is called tropical sage.

One of the most noticeable plants that are blooming now is the fall aster. In its most attractive state the aster forms a mound that blooms for about four weeks every November. Fall aster prospers in full sun. Use it in a challenging spot like the boulevard surrounded by sidewalks and the road. The asters are pruned back to about 12 inches tall every month until September first. At that point the plant is allowed to grow its full mound which will eventually be covered by the blue flowers and the butterflies that seek the nectar they provide. One issue with the fall aster is that the deer eat the plant.

Mexican mint marigold is also blooming now. Manage it the same way as fall aster. The difference is that mint marigold has golden flowers and is deer-proof. Most gardeners find the strong anise fragrance as pleasant but the deer do not seem to like it.