

## What is Blooming Now

02-21-2019

The Texas mountain laurel is among the most noticeable plant that is blooming now. It is noticeable for the purple blooms that decorate the evergreen foliage, but it is also noticeable for the fragrance of those blooms. I have always described the fragrance as the same as that of grape bubble gum we used to buy for a penny from the machine at our favorite store walking home from school when I was in grade school! Others describe the fragrance as duplicating the smell of grape kool-aid. However, you describe it the fragrance, it is distinctive, potent, and pleasant.

The bloom period of Texas mountain laurel only lasts for a few weeks every spring, but the plant is an important part of Central Texas landscapes year around. It is inclined to form a bushy tree to reach about 15 feet tall. Grow it in a well-drained spot in full sun from a container grown plant for best results. They are very drought tolerant and pest resistant. Sometimes the sophora caterpillar will feed on the new foliage but it is easy to control with Bt. Deer do not eat Texas mountain laurel foliage or blooms.

Primrose jasmine is another deer-proof plant that is blooming now. It produces its quarter-sized waxy yellow blooms on a weeping shaped evergreen plant that will grow 8 feet tall and 8 feet in diameter. Primrose jasmine grows in sun or shade. Although not as drought tolerant as Texas mountain laurel, it is a good xeriscape plant.

Red bud is a deciduous tree that grows in sun or partial shade, usually on the edge of larger shade trees. This is often the only time of the year that we notice them because of the pink blooms that emerge from all along the stems and branches in the crown of the tree. They show off for 3 weeks and then go back into hiding for the rest of the year. Nurseries offer the Eastern redbud in addition to the Mexican, Texas and Oklahoma versions. The Eastern version is susceptible to damage from our hot dry weather so select from the Mexican, Texas or Oklahoma versions. Redbuds will grow to 20 feet tall.

The Lady Banks rose is also blooming now. In full sun planted as a specimen it grows to 12 feet tall and 12 feet in diameter with a weeping shape. The blooms are either white or yellow and cover the stems for 3 weeks every spring. Some selections have thorns but the plants now available at the nursery are usually thorn less. Lady Banks roses prefer full sun but plants that have been in place for 30 or 40 years have shown an ability to grow out to or up to the sun as shade trees have grown over them. Deer will eat Lady Banks rose, including older thorny versions that used to escape. The Lady Banks rose is a good xeriscape plant.

Cemetery iris have pure delicate looking blooms, but they are anything but delicate. For decades they have naturalized on old abandoned properties to produce their distinctive white blooms. They prefer to grow in full sun but manage to survive and reproduce in beds long overgrown by shade trees. Obtain cemetery iris rhizomes from other gardeners to plant in your landscape. They are very drought tolerant and are not eaten by the deer. The blooms are showy, and the foliage makes an unusual and attractive groundcover.

If you are looking for a day trip related to gardening today head south to Floresville to participate in the South Texas Home Garden and Environmental Show at the Civic Center. The event offers 70 exhibits, classes on herbs, a silent auction and plant sales from 9am to 6pm. There is no cost to attend and while the plants last, attendees will receive a free transplant. Watch for the phlox, verbena and other wildflowers blooming on the roadsides on the way to Floresville.

Next Saturday March 9 if you are into attracting birds to your landscape, join me at 10 am at Wild Birds Unlimited at 14602 Huebner Rd. I will present a free program covering the topic. Call 210 4792473 for more information