

Hot Weather Color

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We had a cool spring but the hot days and warm nights leading into summer have begun. For summer color there is a long list of blooming shrubs that prosper in San Antonio. They are available in bloom at area nurseries and can be planted now.

Gold Star Esperanza is one of the best. The plant is also called Texas Bells. It has light green foliage and golden, bell shaped blooms. Plant it in full sun with room for it to grow 8 feet tall and 5 feet around. They are available at area nurseries in one gallon to 5-gallon containers. It is important that you select the "Gold Star" variety because of its superior blooming characteristics. Look for the name on the label but also look for the plants, even the smaller transplants, to be in bloom. In addition to being a blooming machine, the Gold Star Esperanza is a top xeriscape selection and is not eaten by deer in most situations. If you are into pollinators, Esperanza is a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds and butterflies. It is also the egg-laying site for the Gray Hairstreak butterfly.

Pride of Barbados is a summer color plant that grows to about the same size as Esperanza and is just as drought tolerant. Also called Poinciana, the Pride of Barbados has airy foliage with small leaflets. The blooms are a "glow in the dark" combination of orange and yellow that are a favorite nectar source for butterflies. Pride of Barbados is less deer-proof than Esperanza but is usually not eaten. Test a planting before you devote your best garden space to the plant in deer country. Pride of Barbados and Esperanza do well when planting together on sunny dry sites. Both freeze back to the ground most winters but re-emerge in late spring.

Fire bush has small red tubular blooms and maroon/green foliage. It begins its bloom period a little later than the Esperanza and Pride of Barbados, but the colorful foliage is showy from the day it emerges for the spring. Grown in the ground, Firebush will grow to 6 or 7 feet tall and nearly as wide. I like it best, however, grown in 5 gallon or larger container on the patio. It forms a compact 3-foot in circumference globe covered with the tubular flowers. Use it on a sunny patio to provide nectar for the hummingbirds. In the fall it will be the motivation for many aerial dogfights with the toughest migrating hummingbirds taking possession while they rest on their way south.

Duranta is another late summer bloomer. It is in the same size category as Esperanza and Pride of Barbados but is slightly less cold sensitive so does not freeze back every winter. The flowers are a lavender/blue or white and are followed by bright yellow berries. Duranta is a showy plant, but to most gardeners its greatest claim to fame is its attractiveness to Monarch and Queen butterflies as a nectar source in the late fall. They will often cover the plant. The berries look like they should be just as attractive to the berry eating birds such as mockingbirds and cardinals, but if they eat them it is not until late winter.

Thryallis is a yellow blooming shrub that grows to about the same size as Esperanza. The plant's growth is upright with the small blooms arranged around the upper part of the stems. It fits in well when planted with Esperanza and is equally deer proof. Pollinators visit the blooms for its nectar.

