

What is Blooming Now?

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It is hard to imagine plants prospering in 100-degree heat but there are many that are blooming. The key to bloom is often water rather than the heat. Keep the plants well watered and they will bloom in the heat.

Bougainvillea is a heat loving plant that is very showy on many patios in the San Antonio area. I hesitate to begin with bougainvillea even though it is very showy. The problem is that growing bougainvillea challenges some of the usual rules of good gardening. To start with, the sun-loving plant does best if it is grown to a rootbound state. Gardeners are discouraged from potting up the plants. A 3ft. diameter plant in a 14-inch container seems to be perfect. If you root or purchase a plant in such a container, tip back the shoots of the stems so it produces more side shoots. Such a plant, rootbound and with lots of side shoots, has a cyclic bloom pattern. It will be covered with blooms for about 6 weeks before it takes a 3-week break and then reblooms in the same pattern through the summer.

It will bloom, that is, if you fertilize it well and don't overwater it. Bougainvillea is an unusual plant in that it blooms best if it is allowed to dry out between watering. Let the soil dry to one-half inch and then water generously until water passes out the drip hole. It is not even a problem if the plant wilts a bit before you water it!

Use a fertilizer made for containers. Osmocote, hibiscus food, and the soluble fertilizers all work.

Bougainvillea are available in many shades of red, pink, lavender, and off-white. There are also variegated plants. The single bloom version is desirable because they drop the spent flowers. The double bloom version is attractive in bloom, but the spent blooms hang on the plant.

Most nurseries have bougainvillea on sale right now. When the temps fall to 40 degrees this fall, they will quit blooming. Bougainvillea need to be protected from the cold in the wintertime.

Side by side with Bougainvillea on many patios are oriental hibiscus in containers. They are also called tropical hibiscus, and like bougainvillea must be protected from cold weather. Until late November, expect the tropical hibiscus to provide daily blooms. Bloom colors include variations of red, yellow, white, pink, and lavender. The same fertilizer you use for bougainvillea works well for tropical hibiscus, but they do not require being rootbound or dried out between irrigations to maximize bloom.

Mallow hibiscus are related to tropical hibiscus. Flare hibiscus and other mallow selections are also taking the heat in stride. Flare has a large red bloom, but mallow hibiscus is also available in pink, white, blue, yellow and lavender. The mallow hibiscus quit blooming in the fall when day length decreases. They are not particularly cold sensitive but the tops dieback each winter. Grow them in the ground or containers and they will sprout in the spring for the summer bloom.

Cora vinca is an ideal full sun summer annual for containers in the hottest part of the patio or garden. It is available in upright and spreading versions with red, pink, lavender white and bi-color flowers. The planting that really impressed me was a large flowered pure white version growing on all sides of a

swimming pool. Planted around the swimming pool it was not affected by the hot concrete or by the chlorine and other volatile materials arising from the pool. Cora is the best choice because it is most resistant to the disease aerial phytophthora that used to devastate vinca plantings whenever there was high humidity or rain.

Gardeners in neighborhoods with deer will also appreciate the fact that the deer do not eat the plant or its blooms. Expect vinca to keep blooming until Thanksgiving.