

What is Blooming in SA Landscapes?

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We have had few freezes in San Antonio, this winter, but we have had cool weather near and below 45 degrees. Dr Larry Stein the Texas A&M Fruit Specialist, reports that San Antonio has had 500 hours of such temperatures which are described as "chill hours". The weather translates into limited freeze damage but adequate cold for plants such as peaches that require chill hours to reorganize their chemistry for a new growing season.

One of the low-chill peaches that is blooming now is the Florida King. It is a very reliable low-chill (450 hours) producer of large cling peaches early in the season, Expect Red Baron, Florida Prince, Texstar, Rio Grande, and Tex King to bloom now as well.

Redbuds are blooming. It surprises people how many of the Oklahoma, Mexican and Texas versions of the tree are prospering in area landscapes. After the 3-week bloom period they will disappear into the tree border again until next winter. Redbuds grow best on the edge of the shade trees. They will grow to 20 feet tall.

I have not seen any, but several gardeners have reported that some ornamental pears are in bloom. It is a common phenomenon for the ornamental pears to react to a hot dry summer and autumn by blooming early. Enjoy the blooms and hope we don't have another hard freeze that damages them.

Texas mountain laurel blooms at the same time as redbud. The evergreen shrub has showy purple flowers with a distinctive grape-Kool-Aid fragrance. Texas mountain laurel grows best in well-drained soil in full sun. It often grows to 15 ft. tall. Some gardeners have had their mountain laurels infested with caterpillars. Spray the foliage with a Bt product if you notice leaf damage.

If you grow snapdragons for cut flowers and garden color, you are used to a period in mid-winter when they take a bloom break. This year the break was very short, and snapdragons are back in bloom. The calendula, stocks and alyssum are also blooming strong in many flower gardens. Stocks and alyssum have very pleasant fragrances that you will notice if you get within several feet of the bed. It is not too late to use containers of stocks or alyssum at the front door for great color and pleasant fragrance. The winter butterflies also use the two flowers as a nectar source and stock make good cut flowers.

One plant that is apparently not blooming yet is paperwhite. Most articles that predict the earliest blooming plants in the year usually mention paperwhite, but this year the combination of record heat this summer and limited moisture seems to have delayed its bloom period. The stems are up so expect some blooms this month. Paperwhite is desirable for its lush early foliage and blooms, and the fact that it is deer proof.

The cool weather we have had is ideal for geraniums. Obtain the plants in full bloom from the retail nursery. Transplant them into decorative containers and place them on the patio. Management of the geraniums involves placing them in full sun as long as the weather is cool (next 3 months) and then move them to a morning sun location. If you obtain one of the Fantasia series plants, they have superior tolerance for warm weather.

Oxalis is one of the winter weeds along with bedstraw, chickweed, and henbit that is overwhelming some lawns this winter, but there several domesticated versions. *Oxalis triangularis* (also called false shamrock) with purple foliage is blooming now in shady flower beds. It is a perennial that returns each year at varying times in winter and spring to decorate its site with the foliage and pink flowers. The false shamrock is almost as tough as the weed oxalis, but it does not spread out of the bed. Control weed oxalis (and henbit, bedstraw, and chickweed) with Weed-Free Zone herbicide but enjoy the purple foliage and pink blooms of the *Oxalis triangularis*.