

Blue Daze, Butterfly Vine, Cora Vinca, and other Texas Superstars

05-21-2020

Every year a team of Texas A&M and Texas Tech horticulturists designate one or more ornamental plants as a Texas Superstar. To receive the designation the plant must be attractive, well adapted and available to the whole State of Texas. In 2020 plants recognized as Texas Superstars have included the Tidal Wave Red Velour Petunia, the Cupcake, Muffin, and Rio Grande Purslane, the Luck Star Deep Pink Penta-, and now Blue Daze.

Blue Daze is a tropical plant that grows 9-18 inches tall (depending on the selection) and spreads to 36 inches around. The foliage is a gray green that provides a good background for the small but showy blue flowers which are its main claim to a special status. As testimony to the attractiveness of its flowers, some gardeners call the plant, "Hawaiian Blue Eyes".

I like Blue Daze best grown in a container with a large surface area to show off the blue eyes, but it also works as a summer blooming groundcover for intimate spaces. In addition to being pleasant to look at, the Blue Daze attract butterflies and other pollinators to its blooms as a nectar source.

The key to Blue Daze performance is a full sun setting and plenty of water. Last winter was exceptionally mild and some Blue Daze survived to sprout again this spring, but usually it only lasts one growing season, unless you shelter it in the winter in a greenhouse.

In 2019 Butterfly Vine was designated a Texas Superstar. The vine gets its name because its seed pods are the size and shape of butterflies. The pods start out green and then turn brown as they mature. Area horticulturist David Rodriguez reports that the pods have long been used as a raw material for butterfly-based crafts.

As distinctive as the pods are, the yellow blooms and the evergreen foliage also are an important part of the plants appeal for area landscapes.

Pollinators including butterflies and hummingbirds use the summer blooming flowers as a nectar source.

The Butterfly Vine is tame enough to grow in a container against a trellis or arbor on a patio. The shiny green foliage, yellow flowers, and butterfly shaped seedpods make it an interesting and attractive addition for visitors to admire. But it is aggressive enough to serve as a hedge to block an unpleasant view when grown on a fence. Expect a plant to grow upward to 15 feet and to cover the same horizontal area. Most winters the vine is evergreen.

Grow Butterfly Vine in full sun. Deer do not eat the vine in most neighborhoods.

Another past named Texas Superstar to consider for the landscape this summer is the Cora Vinca. Up until Cora became available on the market it was a waste of time to plant a vinca/periwinkle before mid-summer because with the first rain during cool temperatures it would melt down from aerial phytophthora. Now with the addition of Cora selections, vinca can be planted in late spring and be

expected to survive in full bloom (red, white, lavender, or pink) until Thanksgiving when the cold weather arrives.

The flowers are attractive and vinca is drought tolerant. Grow it in full sun where the butterflies will use it for nectar without fearing that it will be eaten by the deer.

The Whopper Begonia is the Texas Superstar for a showy plant in the shade. It is closely related to the semperfloren begonia which it resembles except for the larger sized leaves and blooms. Expect it to grow to 30 inches tall and 24 inches around. It is especially attractive when planted in a large clay pot or a half whiskey barrel. There are 2 colors of blooms- red and rose available, and 2 different foliage versions-bronze and green.