

Distribute 07-23-2020

One of the most noticeable plants in area landscapes right now is the coral vine, also called queen's crown. It is noticeable because it is one of our most aggressive summer vines and often is growing high in the yard's trees or over the top of sheds and other buildings.

Coral vine blooms are small but there are thousands of them. There are so many that the vine growing over a shed or brush pile makes me think of the pile or shed being painted pink. In addition to the blooms being thick, they are a favorite nectar source of pollinators such as honeybees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

In addition to the most common bloom color, pink, coral vine is sometimes available in a red version.

The coral vine makes a beautiful specimen and is very desirable because of its value as a nectar source, but its aggressive growth habits can be a problem. You do not want the vine growing over the rose garden or the fruit orchard, but it will, and anything else that stands in the way of its expanding mass. An expanding coral vine grows best in full sun, but its stems will grow into and through shady areas seeking access to more sun. The herbicides, Remedy or Round-up, can be used in the spring for control, but the real relief comes each winter because it is sensitive to cold. The coral vine dies back to the roots with the first cold spell.

Another plant with pink flowers that is attracting attention now is Fanick's phlox. Its upright stalks grow to 3 feet tall and are covered with quarter-size light pink blooms. As showy as the blooms are, the thing I like best about Fanick's phlox is the fragrance of its flowers. The fragrance is the closest thing that Texas gardeners have to the fragrance of lilacs.

Some nurserymen probably will chastise me for even bringing Fanick's phlox up since it is apparently not available in the wholesale market this year. Those of us who were lucky enough to obtain some of the plants that were available in past years will have the benefit of their bloom and fragrance this year. The good news is that it is one of the hardiest of the available phlox so the plants in gardens now should carry us through the point when new transplants are available. Keep your eyes, and nose open to obtain Fanick's phlox when they come back on the market.

In contrast to Fanick's phlox, bougainvillea is an easy plant to find at area nurseries and it is a plant that is blooming profusely in this record hot weather. It is one of the best plants for a patio in full sun. Select from several versions of pink and red plus off-white, variegated and lavender.

Although it seems like most are blooming now, all bougainvillea are cyclical in their bloom, with a 6-week period of color followed by 3 or 4 weeks without flowers. The red and dark pink seem to have longer bloom periods and shorter colorless periods than the other colors.

The plant is unusual for several of its characteristics. For one thing it seems to bloom better when the container is allowed to dry to the point of wilt before more water is applied. When you do irrigate, provide enough water so that it soaks the soil and leaks out the drain holes.

Another key to maximize bougainvillea bloom is to have it reach a root-bound state. It is easiest to reach this situation if you grow the plant in a 10- or 12-inch container.

Prune the top to be 2.5 times as large as the container and keep it at that size by tipping back the main stems. The tipping also encourages side stems and at the end of each side stem a colored bract will emerge. The actual flower is small and inconspicuous. The desirable color comes from the bracts (colored leaves) that surround the flowers.

If you pot-up (increase the container size) for a bougainvillea, expect a period with an increased leaf size and no bloom while the plant concentrates on new vegetative growth to take advantage of larger soil reservoir.

Bougainvillea also does best when it is well fertilized. Granular hibiscus food or Osmocote do well. Some gardeners even apply a soluble fertilizer like Miracle Gro or Miracid in every or every other irrigation.