

What is Blooming Now

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Among the plants that are blooming now are duranta, cape honeysuckle, Turks cap, shrimp plant, and lantana.

My first experience with duranta (also called Brazilian sky flower) was as a 7-foot-tall and 7-foot-wide shrub with purple curly blooms in a neighbor's yard. That is not exactly accurate because I could not really see the purple blooms because they were covered by orange monarch and queen butterflies. It was spectacular. Duranta is one of the favorite fall nectar sources.

Duranta is like esperanza and poinciana in that it is very drought tolerant and often freezes back in the winter. In addition to the purple flowers, duranta is available with white flowers. It also produces small yellow berries every winter that look like they should be relished by the birds but are not a favorite food source. They usually get eaten at the end of the winter. That is not all bad in that you get to enjoy the colorful berries for the whole season.

As the name implies cape honeysuckle is a plant that is native to the Southern Hemisphere where it is a favorite nectar source for pollinators. It is also widely used in Texas as a landscape plant that produces hummingbird nectar. If you have it growing in the fall it produces red miniature size trumpet creeper like blooms that are competed for by the migrating rufous, ruby-throated, and black-chinned hummingbirds.

Cape honeysuckle blooms last until the first freeze. They return every summer and will grow to 8 feet tall as a leaning vine. Usually you can find both the duranta and cape honeysuckle in full bloom at your favorite nursery to use as instant landscape color and nectar source.

Duranta and cape honeysuckle do best in full sun. For a plant that is blooming now that has more shade tolerance, consider Turks cap. It has red flowers and grows to 3 feet tall on most sites. I like to use it for a relatively tall groundcover in the shade. In cold winters it will defoliate but is good about growing back in the spring. Turk's cap is another favorite butterfly and hummingbird nectar source.

Shrimp plant is similar to Turks cap in that it is blooming now, is shade tolerant, and grows to about 3 feet tall. Shrimp plant foliage is even lighter green than Turks cap. You have a choice between a rusty red bloom color and a golden color. Again, the blooms are favorite nectar sources for pollinators. The plants will freeze back to the ground in a severe cold front.

Another pair of plants that are blooming in landscapes and can be purchased at your favorite nursery in full bloom are the spreading lavender lantana and the "New Gold" lantana. The lavender is a different species than "New Gold" lantana and is more cold tolerant. "New Gold" fared well in our 100degree days this summer and is looking good but it will be interesting to see how quickly it declines as the weather cools. The lavender spreading lantana has more shade and cold tolerance and so should

produce bloom well into the winter. There is also an attractive white blooming version of the lavender lantana. All the lantanas provide nectar for pollinators, especially in the fall.