

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the week

By Ursula Nanna

"Texas Super Star Plants"

I recently took a trip to Texas A&M's horticultural and testing stations to experience their process of proving and choosing plants for the Super Star Certification. What a wondrous experience to see rows and beds of plants, trees, shrubs and vines undergoing rigorous testing. Interestingly, San Antonio, not Bryan/College Station, is the source for most plant material.

What attributes make plants a Super Star? First, the plant must lend itself to easy propagation to meet with the high public demand should they attain Super Star designation.

Next, selected plants must be consistent performers and consumer friendly after purchase. The plant must be unique and have desirable eye appeal not found in its common cousins. Pest and disease resistance are requirements and, if deer resistant, that's a big plus! The plants being tested get flooded, water starved, baked, surrounded with brick, stone, plastic sheeting, or weed cloth. They get no mulch, too much mulch, and squashed into small containers to grow and bloom.

The trial program began in 1989 and up until 2007, only 40 plants have been named super stars; 4 of them are million dollar sellers.

These selected Super Star plants are in order of introduction: Blue Bonnet; Satsuma mandarin; gold star Esperanza; May Grande red and Flare hot pink hardy Hibiscus; Belinda's Dream rose; Phalaenopsis orchid; Hamelia patens firebush; Chinese pistach tree; Laura Bush petunia; Mexican petunia; John Fanick phlox; Knock-out rose; blue Plumbago; Lilac Vitex tree; "Henry Duelberg" salvia; Duranta; Salvia leucantha; Possum haw holly; and Lacey oak.

If you choose from among these plants, you may just turn your brown thumb to green. You will have a terrific gardening experience. I have many of these in my gardens after 6 years. Each year they perform better than the last. They are true Super Stars!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmqa@gmail.com