



WHAT'S GROWIN' ON

MARCH 2010

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COOL PLANTS FOR HOT SPOTS

What will you plant after your pansies poop out? Have bare spots from the Big Freeze? Or do you just want to try something new, or a twist on the old? Be prepared for hot colors and a flashback to the 60s. Retailers listed for some of the plants are not necessarily the only ones that will carry these; they're simply ones I've run across. Check out all the nurseries in Houston, especially the Heights, for the vegetative plants; seed sources for AAS winners should be plentiful, or there might even be starts of those at nurseries.



Pennisetum setaceum rubrum 'Fireworks'

Patent #18504

Psychedelic purple fountain grass! Keep a burgundy leaf center, add stripes of hot pink, white and green. Changes colors depending on heat-cold; excels in both containers and landscape.

2'-3'x2'-3', sun, average moisture

Enchanted Gardens, Richmond, will carry this

Photo Courtesy of Itsaul Plants

COMING UP

⇒ Lake Jackson Garden Series

Wed, 03/03/10
12:00pm—1:00pm
Lake Jackson Public Library
"Garden Insect Pests"

⇒ Alvin Garden Series

Sat, 03/06/10
10:00 am—11:30 am,
Alvin Public Library
"Container Gardening"

⇒ BCMGA BOARD MEETING

Tues, 03/09/10
5:30 pm AgriLIFE Office
All members welcome!

⇒ BCMGA MEETING

Tues, 03/09/10
6:30 pm AgriLIFE Office
Brent Moon, Pearland Grower
"Marginal Climate Bananas"

⇒ Angleton Garden Series

Sat, 03/13/10
10:00 am—11:30 am,
Angleton Public Library
"Herbs"



Euphorbia tirucalli 'Rosea'

Firesticks

GROW CORAL. This is 3'x2'. Sun to partial sun, well-drained soil. Landscape or containers

Enchanted Gardens, Richmond will be carrying this.

Photo courtesy of Proven Winners



Pepper 'Cajun Belle'

AAS 2010

2"-3" bell peppers with a zing. High yield on 2' H plants. No diseases.

Seeds or transplants should be available.

MORE COOL PLANTS ...



Hibiscus acetosella 'Haight Ashbury'

FAR OUT, MAN...A new twist on the maple leaf hibiscus. Variegated cream, pink and burgundy. 4'x4', same culture as regular maple leaf: sun, moisture; containers, landscape; re-live the 60s.

Photo courtesy of Proven Winners



Annual Vinca Cora® and Vinca Cora Cascade™

Cora Cascade™ joins the award-winning, disease resistant vinca Cora® series, both Texas Superstars.

The Cora series is 14"-16" H x 24" W and comes in 8 individual colors: Apricot, Burgundy, Lavender, Deep Lavender, Pink, Punch, Violet, White.

Cora Cascade™ is 6"-8" H and trails to 3'. Flowers cover the plant in: Cherry, Lilac, Magenta, Peach Blush, Polka Dot. It would make an excellent replacement for summer-hating petunias.

Humidity proof, but hates wet soil so plant in well drained soil or in containers.

Advertised as available at Cornelius Nurseries, Houston, Tx

Photos courtesy of *Greenhouse Grower Magazine* and Park Seeds

Coprosma ssp New Zealand Mirror Plant

TESTING, TESTING... Most New Zealand plants dislike our steaming summers. Here's hoping that this genus will adapt because its leaves are so shiny, and the new cultivars are so colorful, that they would make a stunning addition to our landscapes. Size depends on cultivar: some are ground covers, others to 6'-8'. They're cold hardy enough for the county, taking at least 20°. Colors are most intense in winter. Would suspect that they need protection against full sun or even afternoon sun here.

Enchanted Gardens has 'Karo Red' (deep purple w/light green new growth); they expect to have other cultivars



Salvia van Houtii 'Dancing Flame'

THE FLOOZY SALVIA... Nothing tasteful about this one. The lemon-lime & dark green variegation is bold, the flowers are brilliant scarlet. Sources suggest a.m. sun at most. Marketed as 3'x3', but could be larger here. Died back in the Big Freeze, but is already sending up new growth. Absolutely needs well-drained soil.

Many Houston area nurseries have it.

Photo courtesy of Mississippi State University



Oryza sativa 'Black Madras' Ornamental Black Rice

DESIGNED FOR BRAZORIA COUNTY... wants wet soil and full sun to reach it's 16"H x 8"W size. Works in containers if the medium is moist enough.

Only U.S. supplier is Park Seeds (and it's been on back-order 2 months); let's hope some area nurseries found suppliers.

Photo courtesy of Park Seeds

WAIT...I had more, but ran out of space. Check out the 2010 AAS Winners Zinnia 'Double Zahara Cherry' and 'Double Zahara Fire', and Watermelon 'Shiny Boy'

THE "DIRT" ON SOIL—PART 2 (Continued from Dec 2009—Jan 2010 *What's Growin' On*)

"Dis-improved" Soils

Compaction

It's not enough that our soils have naturally slow permeability. Except for a small amount of pristine, untouched soils in our area, our soil has been subject to heavy equipment rolling over it, scraping it up, moving it around, concreting over it.

Whether plowed or "developed" into housing subdivisions, heavy equipment significantly compacts soils. The compaction causes just about every molecule of air to be squeezed out. Excessive tilling often causes a layer of "hard pan" (impermeable soil) just beneath the plow zone. And if tillers, dozers and plows worked in wet weather, it's likely that the hard pan layer is like concrete; nothing can get through it — not air, not water, not nutrients, not roots.

Even walking the same path will compact the soil. As a garden sign warns: Tread softly, your feet are killing me.

Fertilizers/Pesticides/Herbicides

If you accept that the soil is an infinitely complex interaction of living and non-living components, excessive use of chemicals disrupts that interaction.

"Naked Soil"

As mentioned earlier, leaving soil exposed results in your soil leaving your property every time the wind gusts (especially if the soil is dry) or the rain falls. "... the direct impact of raindrops on soil or on a thin layer of water over the soil surface constitutes the major force initiating soil detachment. Note, for instance, that "the kinetic energy of falling raindrops at terminal velocity is from one to two orders of magnitude greater than that of flowing water (Hudson, 1971)." Given our monsoon type rains, a water drop can have a velocity at impact of 20 mph.

Loss of Soil Structure

Every "natural" soil has a structure that suits its climatic, microbial and plant ecology. It's in layers. The most happening part is the top layer (the "topsoil"), but all layers, including the sub-soils, contribute to the optimum structure.

If your house was built in the last 50 years, all that earth moving jumbled up the natural layering. Even if the developer left the top soil, it got pushed around or buried.

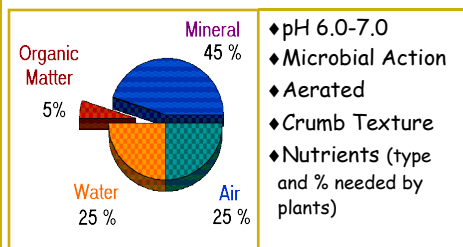
So is it possible to kill the soil — make it into dirt? Yep.



"Contrasting porosity, compaction and organic matter content between the topsoil (0-20 cm) of a forest soil (on the right) and from the same soil type, immediately adjoining the forest site, after 4 years cultivation (on the left). Saaverda, Bolivia"

Photo: R.G. Barber in
FAO.org (United Nations)

The Nature of the Soils We Want



Mineral 45%

Our soils are fairly fertile; nitrogen usually is low; nutrients may need adjusting based on soil test and plants grown.

Organic Matter 5%

This one is tough. Our long growing season, coupled with heat and humidity, causes a rapid breakdown of organic matter. Many sources suggest that 3% is about the most we can hope for in our climate. The sources of organic matter are compost, organic mulches, and organic soil amendments (like alfalfa pellets, composted manures, dried shredded beet pulp). One inch of compost with 3"-4" of organic mulch (shredded cypress, pine needles, straw, wood chips, etc) over the compost should last about 4-5 months. So it's a twice a year job, at least.

Water 25%

In "normal" years, 25% sounds irrational — we're hoping for less than 99%. The same conditions (good humus, structure, mulch) that mitigate drought will help with excessive rainfall as the organic content acts like a porous sponge. That absorption might still be not enough to get the recommended oxygen.

Air 25%

Heavy clay soils with their high density have less available air because the microscopic particles bind together. Add compaction or "low" areas and the soil becomes waterlogged — it's gets that swampy anaerobic smell.

How to Get the Soils We Want

Ground Level Beds

Break up and loosen soil with a spading fork or tiller at least 6" deep, even deeper if there's a hardpan layer. Loosen and amend a whole bed or not at all. A little planting hole with lovely loose soil plopped in dense clay soil will collect the water and drown the plant.

Add organic matter Compost, shredded leaves, clippings, weeds (but not weeds that have gone to seed!), pureed veggie scraps, aged manures.

Plant High Keep about 1/4 of the root ball above the natural soil level, even more for plants that require excellent drainage. Cover the exposed root ball with good loam and mulch that is sloped AWAY from the plant stem. Make sure soil doesn't wash away from roots and that the upper roots don't dry out.

Raised Beds for Optimal Growth & Drainage

Basic Just loosening soil and adding organic amendments will raise the bed surface about 4"-6" above the surrounding soil.

"Lasagna" Layers of cardboard, newspapers and organic material at least 8" deep. Some gardeners let this settle and rot a bit, but others plant in it right away.

Structural Wood, stone, blocks up to 18" high. Needs to be filled with high quality loam and organic amendments.

Mulch, Mulch, Mulch

Add 3" of organic material to all beds. Don't heap up mulch, though, against plant stems or tree trunks. Mulch moderates soil temperature, keeps the soil surface from "concreting" during dry spells, lessens raindrop impact, decreases weed sprouting and breaks down to add to the soil's tilth.

Top Dress

Add compost, organic amendments and mulch throughout the growing season as needed. Just put it on top of whatever is breaking down or bury it under the mulch.

FURTHER READING ABOUT SOIL

Teaming with Microbes. Lowenfels, Jeff & Lewis, Wayne. Timber Press: Portland. 2006, 196 pp, \$24.95

Subtitled *A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web*, the authors split the book into two parts: the science of the soil food web and what each of the microbes does, and then the actions that a grower can take to build up a healthy soil.

Healthy Soils for Sustainable Gardens. Brooklyn Botanic Garden All Region Guides, Niall Dunne, Editor. Brooklyn Botanic Garden: 1000 Washington Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11225. 2009, 119 pp, \$9.95

A concise handbook of all the various components of soil, how to assess and condition soil, compost, mulch, soil care strategies. Readable.

***Lasagna Gardening.** Lanza, Patricia. Rodale Press: Emmaus, PA. 1998, 244 pp, \$12.21

Subtitled *A New Layering System for Bountiful Gardens: No Digging, No Tilling, No Weeding, No Kidding!* The book that influenced a number of new techniques.

***Weedless Gardening.** Reich, Lee. Workman Publishing: New York. 2001, 200 pp, \$8.95

A common sense, practical approach to "gardening from the top down" that protects the soil, eliminates heavy work, and reduces water needs.

***Gardening in the Humid South.** O'Rourke, Edmund N., and Standifer, Leon C. Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge. 2002, 408 pp, \$17.12 (paperback edition, 2004)

Two self-styled "old codgers", horticulture pros, give the science behind the soil. Even better, they disagree vociferously about certain practices and give the reasons why. Here's where to find the involved chemistry. Forget every word they say about liming the soil—they're talking about acidic Louisiana & SE US gumbo. Dense reading in parts, but in general excellent for our soil (don't forget about NOT liming).

*Available in Brazoria County Libraries

Internet: There are any number of web sites that discuss soils, architecture and structure, tilth, fertilizers, microbes. Some are highly technical and deal with a single factor in a single place at a single time. For general purposes, the Texas A&M soil site is as good as any. It's a whole course on soils, compost, mulch and fertilizers: <http://organiclifestyles.tamu.edu/soil/>

MARCH JOB JAR—WHAT'S TO DO THIS MONTH?

Vegetable Garden

Most of the action for this month is in the vegetable garden. **The main event will be planting tomatoes.** Everyone has favorite methods, but the real question is when to do it. Some tomato growers claim that we should put them in on the first of March, while others wait until "after Easter", which would be rather late this year. Vegetable guru Debbie Soderman says the time is right when the soil is warm, while Cindi Goodrum says she plants when the soil is workable. So there aren't any target dates in advance - we plant when it's time.

Debbie points out that the prime growing season for tomatoes in our area is from mid-March into July. Tomatoes will slow down and quit in July no matter when they're planted, so the earlier we can get them into warm soil, the longer our tomato-picking days will be.

How do we plant tomatoes? Deb reminds us that if the seedlings are tall and leggy, we should lay them down in a trench to plant. If we lay the plants, in their pots, on their sides a few days before planting, they will already be turning upward when they go into the ground. The reason to plant as much stem as possible is that tomato plants will form new roots all along any stem that is buried. More stem equals more roots equals more growth.

Ray Michalik puts a bottomless five gallon bucket over/around each tomato planted. This protects the new transplant from wind, and holds water right where it needs to be. Then he puts up his tomato cages, and wraps frost cloth around those. Deb uses a bottomless milk jug around her tomato transplants; on sunny days she can pop off the cap to vent the mini-greenhouse it provides.

Cindi says she always works about half a cup of slow-release fertilizer into each hole or trench, before planting the tomato. Barbara Brown sprinkles Epsom salts in a circle around each plant about two weeks after planting, but only if they "are looking yecchy", technical term courtesy of Bebe.

Of course, it's also the season for planting other things, but there is less agreement on when it should happen. All agree, though, that warm soil is an important requirement for this round of veggies. Earliest will be potatoes, if you haven't gotten them in yet. Soggy soil hasn't been a help with those. By the end of March most agree that our peppers and green beans should be planted. Some add cucumbers, melons, eggplants, and squashes; although others will wait until April for those.

Ornamentals.

It's an in-between month for woody plants. All transplanting and pruning of hardy woodies should be finished up early in the month. Wounds heal most rapidly at the time of the spring growth spurt, which should begin any day, unless this abnormally cool weather holds. Any freeze damaged plants that you plan to give up on can be dug at any time, but anything tender that you hope to resurrect should be left alone another month.

It's an in-between time for herbaceous color plants as well. There's not much point in planting more cool season color now, but it's still not time for the warm season plants. If you must fill in bare spots, snapdragons, petunias and sweet alyssum are still available, and will probably do pretty well into early summer. Pansies and violas are the first to melt as things heat up, so pass on those.

COMPACT PLANTS

Our long growing season, with typically ample rain, tends to make many trees and shrubs grow far beyond the labeled average height and width, especially if fertilized regularly. Just 300 miles north, in the Dallas area, *Loropetalum* (Chinese Fringe Flower) 'Plum Delight' remains a modest dense 3'-5'. On the gulf coast, Kathy Huber suggests that this exact same plant makes a nice small evergreen tree if trained to a single trunk. If you don't want a 'Plum Delight' tree you spend a lot of time whacking, shearing or sawing to keep it in its assigned spot.

If you're willing to search, especially through the internet, you'll find many compact, dwarf or even ground cover cultivars of trees and shrubs. 'Compacta/um' and 'nana/um' after the genus/species signify that the plant is smaller than the species. Named cultivars can be even smaller. For example, *Ilex vomitoria* var. *nana* is a compact yaupon, but matures much larger than 'Schillings (Stokes) Dwarf'. Genus/species HxW are mature size; smaller varieties usually list HxW after 5-7 years of growth. Here's a sampling...

Genus/Species	HxW	Compact	HxW	Dwarf	HxW
<i>Betula nigra</i> (River Birch)	40'x25'			'Little King'	10'x10'
<i>Callistemon viminalis</i> (Bottlebrush)	25'x20'	'Little John'	8'x8' unpruned	'Little John'	3'x3' pruned
<i>Gardenia augusta</i> (Gardenia)	8'+x8'+ eg. 'Mystery'	'Veitchii' 'August Beauty'	4'+x4'+ 6'+x6'+	'Radicans' 'White Gem'	2'x3' 1'-2'x1'-2'
<i>Hamelia patens</i> (Firebush)	8'+x8'+	Lynn Lowery SFA Mast selection x 'Holik'	6'x6' 6'x6'	<i>compacta</i> (selection of <i>H. patens</i> var <i>glabra</i>)	3'+x3'+
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i> (Yaupon)	25'x25'	var <i>nana</i>	8'x10' unpruned	'Schillings (Stokes) Dwarf' 'First Lady' (only dwarf female)	4'x4' 5'x5'
<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i> (Crepe Myrtle)	25'+x25'+ eg 'Natchez', 'Dallas Red'	<u>Medium</u> eg. 'Acoma', 'Catawba', 'Hopi', 'Pecos', 'Zuni'	5'-10'x5'-10'	<u>Mini</u> eg. 'Rosy Carpet', 'Creole', 'Pocomoke'	½'-4'x3'-4'
<i>Leucophyllum species</i> (Cenizo, Texas Sage)	10'x10'	<i>frutescens compacta</i> 'Silverado'	5'x5' 5'x5'	'Thunder Cloud' 'Cimarron'	3'x3' 3'x3'
<i>Loropetalum chinense</i> (Chinese Fringe Flower)	15'x15' 'Plum Delight'	Purple Diamond™ Ever Red™	4'-5'x4'-5' 6'x6'	Purple Pixie™ Bill Wallace™	1'-2'x4'-6' ½'-1'x3'-4'
<i>Nerium oleander</i> (Oleander)	20'x20' eg. 'George Sealy'	<u>Intermediate</u> eg. 'Turners Shari D'	Between 6'-10'	<u>Dwarf</u> eg. 'Petite Pink'	Between 3'-6'
<i>Myrica cerifera</i> (Southern Wax Myrtle)	20'x20'	'Don's Dwarf' 'Fairfax' 'Soleil' (gold-leafed) 'Augusta Green'	4'-6'x4'-6' 4'-5'x4'-5' 10'x10'? 8'-10'x10'	var <i>pusilla</i> 'Myda'	3'-5'x5'+ (suckers) "low growing"
<i>Nandina domestica</i> (Heavenly Bamboo)	8'x8'	'Gulfstream'	4'x4'	'Firepower'	1'-2'x1'-2'
<i>Pinus taeda</i> (Loblolly Pine)	80'+x30'	var <i>nana</i> 'Dixie'	20'x10'		
<i>Pittosporum tobira</i> (Japanese Mock Orange)	10'x10' plus	'Wheeler's Dwarf'	5'+x5'+ unpruned	'Wheeler's Dwarf'	3'x3' pruned
<i>Pittosporum tobira</i> <i>variegata</i>	10'x10' plus	'Shima' (Cream de Mint™) 'Turner's Variegated Dwarf' (Turners Pitt™)			3'x3' (?) 3'x3' (?)
<i>Prunus caroliniana</i> (Cherry Laurel)	30'x15'	'Bright n Tight'	20'x10'	<i>compacta</i>	8'x8'
<i>Rhododendron spp</i> <i>Evergreen Azalea</i> 10,000 named varieties!	8'+x8'+ (Indicas) eg. 'Southern Charm', 'Formosa'	<u>Medium</u> eg. 'Fashion', 'Pericat Pink', 'Fielder's White'	4'-6'x4'x6'	<u>Low</u> eg. 'Gumpo', 'Coral Bells', 'Macrantha Pink'	1'-4'x1'-4'
<i>Taxodium distichum</i> (Bald Cypress)	60'x35'	'Cascade Falls' (weeping)	Depends on leader height	'Peve Minaret' (upright)	10'x5'
<i>Tecoma stans</i> (Esperanza, Yellow Bells)	10'+x10'+ 'Gold Star' unpruned in mild winter	'Gold Star'	can be pruned to almost any size	Dwarf (no name given)	4'x4' (listed at Mortellaro's, San Antonio wholesaler)

ANN McLAIN, THE INQUIRING GARDENER: THOMAS DRUMMOND & HIS PHLOX

In this grim, brown, soggy winter, one plant stands out in my yard. It's the Drummond Phlox (*Phlox drummondii*), which is a native, cool-season annual. The calendulas and snapdragons are healthy and green, but not blooming, for want of sunlight. The heavy rains have battered the petunias and stock into cowering blobs. But three six-inch pots of Drummond phlox have bloomed continuously, through rain and freezing temperatures, since last November. I'd like to nominate them as the Hero Plants of the Whole Darned Winter.

The particular individuals I am nominating were bought as small transplants back in November. I had intended them for a particular project, so I potted them up until needed. Unfortunately, my project went the way of most projects this winter, which is to say, nowhere. Meanwhile the little plants became bigger plants in those pots, and launched into heavy bloom. They had no protection, but the flowers went on. Now, what more could I hope to get for a few bucks?

The Drummond phlox was named in honor of Thomas Drummond, who was the first to collect it and send it to an English botanist, who named it. Drummond was a Scot who came to the Texas Gulf Coast as a plant collector in 1830. He stayed here, collecting everything he found remotely interesting. He sent seeds, dried specimens, and live plants back to his employer. His employer was an English botanist who kept nagging at him to go collect in New Mexico while he was here. Drummond had to set him straight on just how far it was from the Gulf Coast to the headwaters of the Rio Grande. Drummond put in several years of very productive collecting. In 1833 he survived the Great Cholera epidemic, which was soon followed by the Great Overflow, when the Brazos formed an unbroken sheet of water across much of what is now our county. Not long after that, Drummond set off for England and home. He planned to gather up his family and bring them to Texas, because, despite the hardships, he thought he saw an opportunity for a good life here. Unfortunately, he died in Havana on the way home.

Drummond had collected a lot of good stuff while he was here, and when his employer described the plants he received from Thomas, he gave many of them Drummond's name to honor his work. So we know that Drummond collected the Drummond red maple, the rough leaved dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*),

our local Turk's cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus drummondii*), and many more.

The Drummond phlox seemed to satisfy a lot of European desires in that garden-mad era. Breeders all over England and Europe propagated the phlox and selected for all the variation they could find. The new developments were soon back in North America. In 1844 an early American garden designer, Andrew Jackson Downing, was recommending this phlox as an essential for garden beds in good taste. The Burpee seed catalog of 1888 listed about twenty different varieties of Drummond phlox. There were tall ones, short ones, large flowered forms, and varieties with fancy star markings. Colors ranged from white to pink to rose, and included cream and yellow.

But over time, Drummond phlox lost a lot of its popularity, along with other annual darlings of the Victorian age. Was it because of some property of its own, or was it simply because of competition in the marketplace from flowers that were newer, brassier, and better publicized?

In recent years Drummond phlox seems to be having a little come-back. The City of Houston, for instance, sows seed of phlox in the grass along its bayous, where it blooms along with the bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush. Some seed catalogs now list four or five varieties, all short, but presenting some interesting blends of colors. Transplants don't turn up in the big box stores, however.

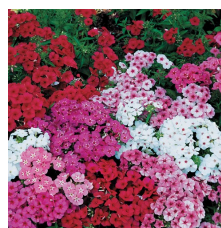
Drummond phlox does turn up in the better nurseries in the late fall, or you can get seeds and start them yourself. The plants from the nurseries get off to an earlier start. Evidently they are grown in cooled greenhouses somewhere, so that they can be started early in the fall, and be ready to bloom by winter. They are in bloom well before seed grown outdoors here is even up. This phlox will re-seed itself, but then it will be primarily a spring phenomenon. And after a few years, the interesting palette of colors and special markings will disappear back into something that resembles the rosy red wild form.

When the weather hots up in May, the Drummond phlox will melt away. Because mine are in pots, and not shaking their seeds out on some fertile patch, that will be the end of them. Unless I get them into the ground somewhere in time to capture some of that goodness.



The original *P. drummondii*
6"-20"

Native only
to the eastern half of
Texas!



'21st Century Mix'
12"; first F1 hybrid;
some individual colors;
Park Seeds



'Coral Reef'
12"-18"; fragrant; unusual color range.
Colors more intense than 'Phlox of Sheep'



'Tapestry Mix'
12"-15"; Wide range of colors; some with darker eye zone, and bi-colors; nice



'Sternenzauber' / 'Twinkle'
8"; some petals elongated—hence the English 'Twinkle'. Seed not common yet in U.S. Europeans are raving about this one.

PLANTS OF THE MONTH

BROMELIAD: *Aechmea distichantha* (Brazilian Vase Plant)**Size:** 3'-4" H x 3'-4' W**Shape:** Vase-shaped funnel**Foliage:** Evergreen large up-right strap leaves with vicious incurved close-set spines on leaf margins**Light:** Filtered sun**Water/Soil:** Epiphytic, but will anchor in well-drained soil. Loves humidity; water in cup when necessary**Flowers:** 1'+ pyramid shape; electric blue flowers with bright rose-red bracts; monocarpic**Fertilize:** Minimal in cup**Propagation:** Pups after parent plant flowers; fresh seeds**THE BIGGEST, BADDEST BROMELIAD**

that we can grow outside in this area according to Yucca-Do Nursery. It took the hard freeze unscathed and will soon put up spectacular flower spikes that last a couple of months; the fleshy seeds are also showy and last another month.

Grow this as a ground cover, in a pot, or set up in tree crotches. Like all bromeliads the parent plant dies after flowering, but sends out pups which can be removed. However, working with this devil is not for the faint-hearted. Its leaf spines put agaves to shame — they're smaller, but closely set and perpendicular to the leaf edge, and there are hundreds of them on each relatively narrow leaf. Families with small children or pets should probably pass on this one, but it's guaranteed intruder-proof planted under a window.

Available: Internet, passalong.

**SHRUB:** *Loropetalum chinense* (Chinese Witch Hazel or Fringe Flower)**Size:** Depends on cultivar**Shape:** Layered, rounded**Foliage:** Evergreen purple, fading to green; newer retain purple**Light:** Full to Part Sun**Water/Soil:** Average, well-drained soil. Supposedly retains leaf color best in slightly acidic soil. Average water.**Flowers:** 1"+ long ribbons in clusters in leaf axils; early spring; most screaming magenta**Fertilize:** Average, acidic**Propagation:** Stem cutting of non-patented plants**NOT JUST 'PLUM DELIGHT'**

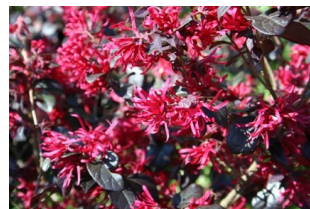
Since its introduction 20 years ago, Chinese Fringe Flower has become one of the most ubiquitous shrubs in commerce.

Until recently, your choices were limited to just about one—'Burgundy' aka 'Plum Delight'—which grows and grows until it's a tree. So it's been hacked into meatballs if in a foundation planting, thereby destroying the graceful layering of the natural form.

Hybridizers are now introducing

new compact varieties, some of which keep their deep purple leaves throughout the season.

Cay Dee Caldwell of Caldwell's Nursery in Rosenberg recommends Ever Red™. Keeping its deep purple leaves throughout summer on a 6'x6' shrub, it also has the reddest flowers so far and can re-bloom.



Another new one is called Purple Diamond™ 5'x5', retains color.

And then there's Purple Pixie™, the ground cover at 2'x5'.

**'NATIVE' ANNUAL/PERENNIAL:** Phlox x 'Intensia®' (Hybrid Drummond's Phlox)**Size:** 8"-18" H x 8"-18" W
Depends on color**Shape:** Loose mound**Light:** Full sun or p.m. shade**Soil:** Moist, well-drained**Water:** Normal**Flowers:** 1" in heads 4"+ across; 8 colors to date.**Fertilize:** Heavy; 1/week**Propagation:** Patented; propagation not allowed

WAIT! Are Ann McLain's phlox (seen in this photo) the new Intensia® vegetatively propa-



gated hybrids? Might be. Proven Winners has *Phlox drummondii* hybridized with an unnamed southwest native phlox. The result is an award winning series of almost ever-blooming "annual" phlox (listed as a zone 10 perennial) that is much more cold and heat tolerant than the seed grown annual phlox with a vastly expanded bloom season.

Individual colors include: Blueberry, Cabernet, Lavender Glow, Neon Pink, Orchid Blast, Pink, Star Bright, White. None require dead heading.

Google "phlox intensia" for articles from extension services across the deep south praising this series.

BCMGA

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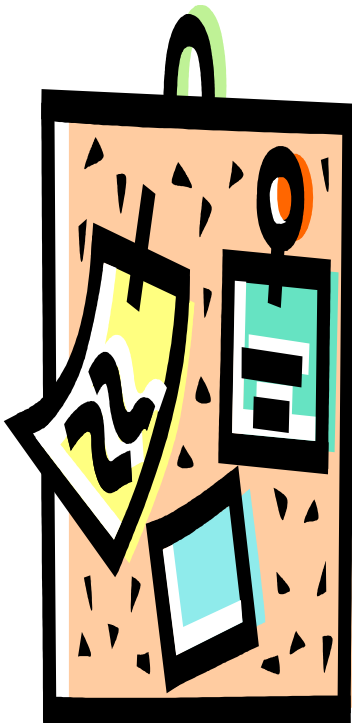


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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



Tomato 101: The Basics of Growing Tomatoes, On-line Training, Extension Horticulture eLearning

Tomato care and production in at-home, self-paced 8 chapters, quizzes, certificate
Qualifies as Advanced Training for Master Gardeners
<http://www.horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/>

2010 State Master Gardener Conference in Dallas, TX (April 8-10): Registration Continues

Information at <http://www.2010tmgaconference.org>

Volunteers Always Needed: B.E.E.S. (the gardens), every Tuesday and Friday, 7:30am-12:00pm

Mercer Arboretum: March Mart Plant Sale, Friday-Saturday, March 26-27, 8:00am-4:00pm

Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine Westfield Road, Humble, TX

The region's largest plant sale (with the largest crowds so go early)

Additional info at: <http://www.hcp4.net/merc>

Harris County Master Gardener Green Thumb Series: Great Plants for Houston, Tuesday, March 9, 6:30pm-9pm

Presented by: Dr Carol Brouwer, Harris County Extension Agent

Bass Pro Shops, 1000 Basspro Drive (Hwy 288 at Beltway 8), Pearland

Brazosport Garden Club: Growing Roses on the Texas Gulf Coast, Tuesday, March 2, 7pm-9pm

Presented by Baxter Williams, Master Rosarian, Houston Rose Society

Lake Jackson Public Library, 250 Circle Way

Spring Plant Sale: Our Spring Plant Sale will be coming up soon. We would like for members who are dividing or rearing beds and have plants that are unusual, hard to find (can't buy at the big box stores), or that are good reliable performers, to please let us know what they may have. Contact Cindy Goodrum to see if we can use them for the plant sale. Thanks for everyone's help and support. Cindy