

Easy Care Gardening with Texas SuperStars, Perennials and Native Plants

By Sheri Bethard, Master Gardener

Texas SuperStars, Perennials and Native plants, to me can all be pretty much lumped into one big category. **Texas SuperStar** plants are those plants that have gone thru rigorous testing by Texas A&M AgriLife and others to determine if they qualify to be called Texas SuperStar. These plants are observed for a number of years at numerous locations thru out the State of Texas watching their performance in that specific landscape. If it does well in all areas of the state, then it could make the Texas SuperStar list. This list of plants includes annuals, per-annuals, perennials, trees, woody shrubs, and specialty plants. Some of the familiar Texas SuperStar plants are the Texas Bluebonnet, Plumbago, Laura Bush Petunia, Mexican Bush Sage, Belinda's Dream Rose and Deciduous Holly. For more information and a complete list of the Texas SuperStar plants can be found at the Texas SuperStar website: <http://texassuperstar.com/plants/index.html>.

Perennials are plants that live more than 2 years. Again, they can be tree, flower, grass, herb, vegetable, and/or shrub. Many of the horticulturalists refer to these plants such as verbena, oregano, coneflower, and hardy hibiscus as herbaceous (herb for short) plants. In a lot of the gardening books you will see them referred to as herbs and not to be confused with the herbs you use for cooking.

Natives are just what the name references to native plants. Those plants which are native to the area. Some native plants which are native for example are the Cardinal Flower, Indian Pink, Southern Wood Fern, Black-eyed Susan, Milkweed, Texas Mountain Laurel just to name a few. Natives, like perennials do come back year after year. You can find more information on native Texas plants at Native Plant Society of Texas website: <https://npsot.org/wp/>

Most of the Texas SuperStars, Perennials and Natives all are sun-loving plants so care must be taken when choosing a place for planting. Most are drought tolerant but will still need some water in drier times. Remember this area will be their home for years to come. There are perennials that bloom just in spring, some just in summer and those, which bloom just in fall. And some do bloom in winter.

In addition to the perennials, there are some annuals that will act as perennials in our Zone 9. Angelonia is one. I have seen them come back year after year with good mulching.

When planning your garden, take time and plan what you are going to put where. Taller plants should go in the back so the shorter plants will be able to be seen in the front. Read about your plants before putting them in the soil and make sure you are allowing enough spacing for them. For example, I planted a Porter Weed last year not realizing how big it would get. It got to about 5 feet tall and 5 feet wide covering other things in my bed. I am prepared for it this year as it has started coming back and I am ready for it to take over again.

If you mix drought tolerant plants with other plants, make sure they are a little higher so their soil

will drain better. You don't want water to pool around their roots, which will end up killing them for being too wet.

If you have acid loving plants, keep them together so you can keep their pH level higher than the other plants. It will be easier on you to work on one area instead of trying to work on the pH of individual plants.

For winter preparation, the best thing you can do is to prepare your plants with a good layer of compost and mulch. The compost will help give the nutrients the roots need along with keeping them warm and the mulch will help seal in the heat. When spring comes, be patient, as it will take time for new growth to come out. During the winter your plants' roots have been getting stronger and this will help your plant be stronger in the spring. Once it pops out and starts growing, you will be surprised at the end product.

An added bonus for a lot of these plants is they are also great bee, butterfly and hummingbird plants. Keep your garden organic so the wildlife can enjoy it too.

Once you have your plants chosen and planted, water daily, (except succulents) unless it rains, until they are established. Fertilize your plants according to the requirements of the different perennials. Remember these plants are going to be with you for a long time and will thrive with a good head start. Deadheading and pruning perennials are an important part of their care. Prune perennials, if needed, immediately after they finish blooming. If you wait to prune you may be cutting off your next year's blooms. Many perennials have a first flush of blooms in the spring and with a later summer pruning will bloom again in the fall. Check bloom time and learn about the correct pruning time for your chosen plant.

Sun Loving Perennials, Texas SuperStars and Natives



Duranta

Esperanza



Lantana



Coneflower



Cat Whiskers



Turks Cap



Penta

Milkweed Perennial Sage Shrimp Plant



Impatiens



Abutilon

Bleeding Heart



Mona Lavender

Some Fall Blooming Plants



Pineapple Sage



Copper
Canyon Daisy



Mexican Bush
Sage



Chrysanthemum