

# Texas-tough landscape plants shine in drought

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



October 12, 2011



During the past weekend, I heard several booms from the outdoors — it was the sound of thunder.

My first thought was, “Are the rain clouds just teasing us again with the prospect of rain?” “Will this be a hit-and-run shower that hardly settles the dust?”

Gardeners, one and all, likely were pleased and a bit amazed at the plentiful rainfall that helped to quench thirsty trees and lawns.

It has been amazing how many records were set during the 2011 summer for daytime temperatures, nighttime temperatures, days without rain and windy days.

As I pointed out in previous columns, one silver lining to

such onerous weather conditions is that landscape plants that can take a Texas-tough licking and keep on ticking would be revealed.

Several plants in the landscape that provided stellar performances during the summer earned my “2011 Energizer Bunny Landscape Performance Award” for withstanding the summer’s very harsh growing conditions and delivering color to the landscape under duress.

Last week, a gardener asked if we would have any plants in our upcoming plant sale that would be worthy of my performance award. My answer was a definite yes.

The Galveston County Master Gardeners’ Ornamental and Perennial Plant Sale is from 9

a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday near the Wayne Johnson Community Center in Carbide Park, 4102 Main Street (FM 519), in La Marque.

Check the website at the end of the column to peruse though the list of sale plants with photos and descriptions.

Here are some of my top picks for a Texas-tough landscape.

- Peppermint flare hibiscus provides stunning color summer to early fall, thrives in the summer heat, requires very little maintenance after established and is so pest resistant that you seldom will need to apply any pesticides.

Peppermint flare hibiscus is a root-hardy, compact perennial with large, 8- to 10-inch flow-

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*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*



ers. Peppermint flare hibiscus produces practically sterile flowers, which encourages luxuriant re-blooming.

Our peppermint flare hibiscus was grown at the old demonstration garden next to the office in Dickinson and was not watered at all throughout the dry summer.

In early June, the plant was removed from the old garden and moved to the Carbide Park garden. It already has produced a flush of new leaves and is set to produce many more beautiful flowers into the fall season.

- Tacoma stans is another Texas-tough shrub. We also transplanted a large-sized tacoma stans from the old to the new demonstration garden just as the summer-long drought was setting in.

I have to admit the transplanting process violated every horticultural guideline I advocate for moving plants.

Because of circumstances beyond my control, it was literally yanked out of the ground with a back hoe and unceremoniously dumped on black asphalt pavement for two days in the searing heat of June with torn roots exposed to direct sunlight before I spotted its shriveling remains.

I heaved the dehydrated plant into the bed of my pickup and moved it to its current domicile in Carbide Park. I think it so appreciated the rescue and my confidence in its resurrection that it rebounded with new growth and flowers during the record-breaking summer heat with just minimal tender loving care being provided.

As a Texas native, this low-maintenance plant is prized for its striking masses of golden yellow trumpet-shaped flowers and dark green, glossy divided leaves.

The flowers hang in showy clusters at the branch tips and forks, bending the twigs into arches with their weight.

Plant one in a container or in a sunny,

well-drained area and it will reward you with brilliant yellow blooms spring through fall.

- Turk's cap is yet another example of a tough Texas native that blooms, from late spring until frost and attracts hummingbirds, butterflies and moths.

The common name comes from the brilliant red blossoms which do not open but are whorled in the shape of a turban with the stamens protruding.

I'm most impressed with the variety named big momma. Big momma is a hybrid that grows up to 6 feet tall and wide and produces an abundance of flowers one-third to one-half larger than most varieties.

Since it is a hybrid, it does not produce seeds.

Peppermint flare hibiscus, tacoma stans and big momma's turk's cap have proved their toughness by thriving under the summer's tough growing season.

Even the neglectful gardener should be able to grow these Texas-tough landscape plants.

