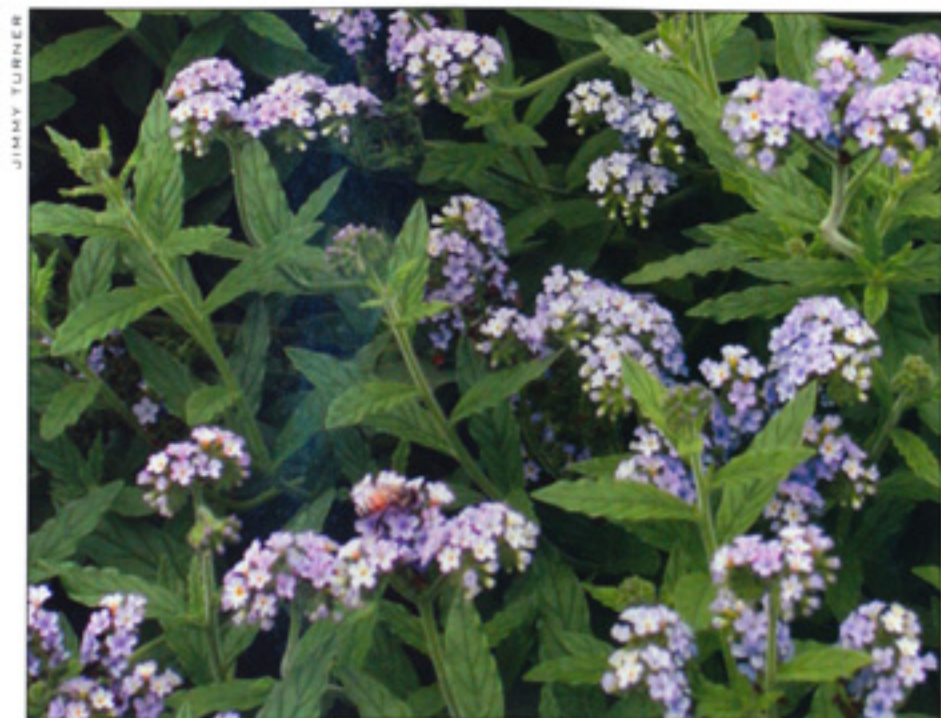




# 'Azure Skies' Heliotrope

*Months of blooms and a tough nature  
make this plant a Texas garden must-have*

Jimmy Turner



**Top:** Close inspection reveals fiery yellow eyes. **Above:** Diminutive lavender blooms dot 'Azure Skies' heliotrope from spring to frost.

Often, great plants for our area are overlooked for their showier relatives which don't perform as well in Texas.

*Heliotropium amplexicaule* is a prime example. Many gardeners have tried the showy heliotrope, or "Cherry Pie" annual heliotrope, with little success in our Texas climate. *H. 'Azure Skies'* creeping heliotrope is a completely different plant that is ideally suited to our unique gardening conditions.

At first glance, this plant resembles verbena. The fast growing trailing stems of light green are topped constantly from early spring until frost with pale lavender flowers centered with bright stars of yellow.

low. The flowers are held on curled stems that unfurl as new flowers open. Unlike its relative *Heliotropium arborescens*, *H. amplexicaule* 'Azure Skies' is not fragrant, but bees and butterflies always stop at the attractive flowers.

The heat-loving plants develop deep taproots which help them survive our hot, dry summers. I have experienced few problems of diseases or insects. Unlike verbenas, these plants are highly resistant to mildew.

*H.* 'Azure Skies' will quickly spread to form 3-foot mats of soft-textured foliage. The plants seldom reach more than 10 inches tall. The vigorous growth of this plant and constant flowering make it a winner for use as a summer annual, but as a bonus for gardeners in Zones 7 and southward, this plant is a reliable perennial. No special care is required other than consistent watering during dry periods, and occasional light fertilization. This plant always looks tidy and does not need shearing or removal of old blossoms.

The pastel flowers of 'Azure Skies' creeping heliotrope need to be viewed

close-up, so plant it near the edge of the border where viewers will pass by it. I would recommend using this plant to soften the edges of borders or cascading over the edges of containers or walls. If using *H.* 'Azure Skies' as a perennial, underplant it with narcissus. The fast-growing stems of the plant will help hide the maturing narcissus foliage.

*H. amplexicaule* 'Azure Skies' has been in the nursery trade for a few years, but it has only recently become available to Texas gardeners. I believe many people were hesitant to try this plant because its relative, *H. arborescens* does so poorly here. After two years of testing in the Dallas Arboretum Plant Trials, I would recommend this plant to any gardener in the state! Try some yourself this year. ★

*About the author:* Jimmy Turner is Director of Horticulture Research at the Dallas Arboretum. He oversees the trial gardens there, and is responsible for all color installations.

## AT A GLANCE

**Latin Name:** *Heliotropium amplexicaule* 'Azure Skies'

**Common Name:** Creeping heliotrope

**Flowers:** Unfolding stems of light lavender with yellow eyes

**Foliage:** Spreading mounds of foliage resembling verbenas

**Mature height:** Flower spikes will top out at 10 inches and plants spread to 3 feet

**Hardiness:** Winter-hardy to Zone 7, exceptional heat tolerance

**Soil:** Not particular as long as well-drained

**Exposure:** Full sun

**Water usage :** Low, once established

**Sources:** Local retailers