Heliotrope ‘Simply Scentsational’ has been a sensation in our trial gardens at the Dallas Arboretum the last few years. This relative of the more familiar *Heliotropium arborescens* has performed well enough from spring until fall to win our coveted “FlameProof Plant” award for its ability to withstand even our harshest summer heat and keep on flowering.

When you first see ‘Simply Scentsational’, it actually looks like a trailing verbena with simple soft green leaves and softly mounding stems, but the next thing you’ll notice is the incredible fruity fragrance. The plant constantly produces 2-inch clusters of pale lavender-blue flowers with primrose yellow throats that resemble forget-me-nots. The heavenly scent attracts butterflies and hummingbirds in profusion. This plant is not fussy about soil, just as long as it is well-drained. If you have clay soils, I recommend a healthy addition of expanded shale to allow for drainage.

‘Simply Scentsational’ heliotrope looks delicate and soft, but don’t let that fool you. This plant is tough! It will flower from early March right up until a hard frost knocks it back in early winter. Even during the 100-degree-plus days (of the hottest summer on record) in full sun, this plant always had a great flower show. It is truly easy to grow. It prefers full sun, but will grow in late afternoon shade or light shade. Once established, it is also quite thrifty with water use. Originally we considered this plant a tender annual in our area and assumed that a good freeze would kill it completely. But, by accident a couple of years ago, we didn’t
pull the plants out over the winter and have since discovered that if you are in Zone 8 or farther south, it is a reliable perennial. The foliage and flowers on this plant can actually handle a light frost, which makes it great for that early springtime frenzy when you just have to have something in your containers, even though you know it’s going to freeze again. If you live along the Gulf Coast, or have a saltwater swimming pool, another great thing about this plant is it is salt-tolerant. In our trials over the last three years we’ve never seen any fungal or insect problems on it either.

‘Simply Scentsational’ grows equally well planted in the ground or in containers, but the more I use it, the more I prefer it in a tall pot or hanging planter, to showcase its trailing habit and to get those scented flowers even closer to my nose. I recommend using it as a spiller in large containers at your front door or on your patio so you can enjoy the fragrance and flowers close up. The pale flowers are really best enjoyed at close range; their subtle colors just do not show up from the back of the yard. This is a plant that is best used where you will walk or sit near it. If your house has west-facing window boxes, I can finally recommend a plant that will take that heat during the summer and still enchant you when your windows are open in spring and fall. If you’d like to use ‘Simply Scentsational’ in your perennial border, I recommend planting it near the front of the border or cascading over a retaining wall. Use this one in the landscape as you would ‘Homestead’ verbena, which makes a great companion plant.

You should be able to find ‘Simply Scentsational’ heliotrope in any local nursery where Proven Winners plants are sold. Most likely, you will find the plants in quart-sized pots and hanging baskets. Just remember that you don’t need many; this plant will quickly spread to 3 feet across. I’d space them at 12 inches in the ground – and in large pots, about the same.

About the author: Jimmy Turner is senior director of gardens at the Dallas Arboretum and a contributing editor to this publication. Visit www.dallasplanttrials.org for more information on his trials.
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