I have always loved the way cleome looks in catalogs and in gardens I've visited across the nation, but to tell you the truth, I haven't had that much luck with it here in Texas. Every variety I've trialed in the last five years has disappointed me. Even though the plants flowered beautifully in spring, the flowers stopped and the bottom leaves fell off as soon as the temperatures rose over 100 degrees. By the end of summer, a bed of tall, gangly plants with few leaves and a lot of seeds confronted me. Oh, and did I mention the thorns? Those spindly little stalks had wicked rose-like thorns hiding out in them!

Then I invited Cleome 'Senorita Rosalita' to join the party and she outflowered all the competition. Unlike other varieties, this cultivar flowers from late spring through the heat of summer and right up until fall. Another great attribute of this variety is it doesn't set seed, so there is no dead-heading! The dark-green foliage forms 3- to 5-foot upright mounds in the garden that are continually crowned with clusters of bright lavender-pink blooms, and there are no thorns!

In the garden, 'Senorita Rosalita' adds much-needed height to the back of landscape beds and large containers. I like to combine it with the deep burgundy foliage of purple fountain grass (Pennisetum setaceum 'rubrum') or Alternanthera 'Purple Knight', then accent it with either the bright pure-blue of Ageratum 'Artist Blue' or the lacy white flowers of Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost'. If you are into attracting butterflies to your garden, then this is a plant for you. All summer long 'Senorita Rosalita' plays host to a halo of butterflies.

At the garden center, you will likely find Cleome 'Senorita Rosalita' in 5-inch or 1-gallon containers. Since this cultivar is sterile, it can be grown only from cuttings, so don't look for seeds or 4-inch pots. For the best garden performance, I recommend using a high-nitrogen fertilizer regularly to keep the foliage dark green and the plants in flower. This heat- and drought-tolerant plant prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Once established, it has a low water requirement.

If you have given up on cleome like I had, then I tempt you to invite this Latin lady to your garden. With a name like 'Senorita Rosalita' this heat-loving annual is guaranteed to spice up your yard all summer long!

**About the author:**
 Jimmy Turner is the director of horticulture research at the Dallas Arboretum. Visit www.dallasarboretum.org for more information on his trials.

**At a glance**

- **Latin name:** Cleome hybrid 'Senorita Rosalita™ 'Inncleest' PPAF
- **Common name:** spider flower, spider plant or grandpa's whiskers
- **Plant type:** warm-season annual
- **Flowers:** classic, pink cleome flowers
- **Foliage:** upright, green
- **Mature height:** 24 to 48 inches
- **Hardiness:** annual
- **Soil:** well-drained
- **Exposure:** full sun
- **Water usage:** low
- **Sources:** local nurseries

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