Regional experts look for Texas-tough plants, and they've found them

By MARIANA GREENE
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This time of year, we're lured like mythological sailors to the sirens' rocks by catalog photographs of lushly blooming flowers. At garden centers, we're sorely tempted by bedding plants that have been chemically treated in growers' greenhouses to ensure a floriferous debut in the retail aisles. The U.S. Department of Agriculture may designate a plant officially suitable for our Zones 7 and 8, but that's no guarantee that a plant will prosper in North Texas.

We have poor soil, too much water some seasons, too little water other seasons, wild fluctuations in temperatures from October to May and that miserably long stretch of baking, scorching summer.

You have to do your homework to know which annuals — and there are plenty — are most likely to survive our soil and climate. On the other hand, if your fingers are itching to ease into those new garden gloves instead of turning the pages of horticultural tomes, take our experts' word for it and take this shopping list to your favorite garden center.

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annualls awards

1. Cuphea llavea ‘Georgia Scarlet’ It's ugly when small at garden centers, but it's heat-loving, fast-growing and flowers constantly. C. ‘David Verty’ also scored well.

2. Euphorbia ‘Diamond Frost’ This is the first euphorbia that seems to be impervious to our heat and humidity, says professor Brent Pemberton of the Texas A&M research center in Overton. “It provides a cloud of tiny white flowers all summer long.”

3. Gallardia ‘Torch Yellow’ Nonstop color, says Mr. Pemberton, plus nice, compact habit. Shear back spent blooms for continuous color. G. ‘Sundance Bicolor’ also scored well.

4. Heliotropeum amplifolium ‘Azure Skies’ Fast-growing, long-flowering and takes full sun, but it has no fragrance, not what one expects from heliotrope.

5. Pentapetes phoeniculca ‘Copper Cups’ With its summing up mallow-shaped flowers, Pentapetes grows in wet or dry conditions.


7. Purslane ‘Fairytale’ series Flowers heavily all summer. ‘Cinderella’ is Arboretum patron favorite.


Selections from the Phlox ‘Intensa’ series (in background) are usually a spring annual for North Central Texas, but it flowered all summer at the Arboretum.

PHOTO CREDITS: NATALIE CAUDILL/Staff Photographer 3, 5; Ball Seed 7, Jimmy Turner 1, 6; Proven Winners 2, 4, 8, background photo
Our favorite annuals

**HOUSE & GARDEN** Celebrate spring by checking out the top annuals picked by local horticulture experts. Among our favorites (clockwise from top left): ageratum houstonianum, bouvardia ternifolia, cosmos sulphureus and angelonia. First in a five-part series about your spring garden. 1E