2020 is the Year of the Lantana

Lantana (Lantana sp.) has a rich history of being utilized in the garden for long-lasting, colorful blooms, superior heat tolerance and the ability to attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. In the 18th century, lantana was a popular greenhouse plant in Europe and breeding efforts were extensive, resulting in hundreds of available selections available for the home gardener. Featuring clusters of bright colors, solid as well as multi-color, Lantana can be used in containers, landscaping and hanging baskets.

Basic Types

Lantanas fall roughly into two forms: mounding or trailing. Always consider the final plant size when choosing your varieties as some can get quite large and compete for space with neighboring plants. Compact and upright forms are readily available and perfect for small spaces and containers. Trailing forms which can spread up to three feet, have the most significant flowering and are ideal to economically fill in larger areas with an impressive display of color. Lantana is commercially propagated from cuttings and available to home gardeners through garden centers and even some plant catalog companies. Established young plants will quickly take off after transplant, which is essential in regions with short growing seasons. Grafted, “tree form” lantanas are another consideration and are more commonly offered in warmer locations.

The great news about lantana is that deer and rabbits leave it alone because of a “disagreeable odor” of the leaves. Parts of the plant can be toxic to some animals, but they are not toxic to birds which spread this plant in warmer climates. Non-native lantana has become a weed in some citrus groves and is problematic in Florida, Georgia, Texas, Hawaii and other warmer states. These concerns have led to breeding for sterility which means there are now several sterile varieties readily available (see list below). Gardeners in warmer climates can now enjoy sterile lantana without the worry of reseeding.

Varieties

Some of the most popular and available lantana series are included below. There are some exciting variegated foliage selections to consider as well, such as: Cosmic Firestorm™ and Lemon Swirl® among others. The varieties that are sterile include ‘Gold Mound’, Hot Blooded™, ‘New Gold’, ‘Alba’, ‘Patriot’ and the Bloomify™ Series.

- **Bandana®** - superior, compact and mounded forms
- **Bandito™** – smaller in size but intensely color flowers
- **Bandolero** – big bold plants good for northern regions
- **Bloomify™** - first “sterile certified” lantana series
- **Havana™** - naturally compact series, minimal seeding
- **Landmark™** - thrives in heat, humidity and drought, solid performer
- **Little Lucky™** - dense and compact habit, heavy flowering
- **Lucky®** - early flowering, more compact
- **Luscious®** - excellent in baskets & mixed containers
Tips For The Home Gardener

Lantanas grow best in full sun in well drained locations and containers. Avoid overwatering or placing lantanas in poorly drained locations, but don’t let them dry out! Be wary of using lantanas in heavily irrigated locations which may provide excess moisture and contribute to disease problems. In colder climates, plant after the threat of frost, ideally after the soil has sufficiently warmed.

Powdery mildew may become an occasional issue on lantanas, particularly during cool, wet summers and in situations where proper air circulation isn’t available. Root rot and sooty mold will occasionally become factors in overly damp situations as well. Luckily, lantanas are relatively insect free making them an easy-care plant for the home garden.

Lantanas, while benefiting from some fertilization, require very little attention in this regard. Over fertilization may result in more stem and foliage growth at the expense of flower production. Deadheading (removing spent blooms) will help encourage more flowering and overgrown specimens can be pruned back severely to maintain them in a more compact form.

For the Really Curious:

While there are 150 species of lantana in the verbena family (Verbenaceae), the most commonly used ornamental selection is Lantana camara (native to the American tropics) although some other species (native to a range of tropical locations) and hybrids are available. This plant, hardy to zone 8, can be a perennial (tender perennial in zone 7) or medium shrub in frost-free locations, but is most commonly used as an annual in colder areas. The flat-topped flower umbels (clusters of tubular blooms) may feature multiple colors with the newest flowers opening in the center of the umbel and older flowers fading to another color on the outer edges of the cluster. This maturation of the flowers within the umbel can lead to two or even three-toned flowers. A slight, spicy flower fragrance is typical for most selections and many species. Lantana flowers come primarily in shades of red, orange, yellow, white, pink or lavender.

For more varieties, visit ngb.org

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