

Flowers for Summer Color

Elaine Cameron

Angelina Master Gardener

Winter rains in East Texas have given us a colorful springtime show. Roadsides are awash in a sea of wildflowers while pansies and snapdragons are blooming in home gardens. Now is the time to choose bedding plants that will thrive in our hot summer sun and provide blooms from early summer until frost.

Pentas have clusters of five petaled flowerets that are available in many shades of red and pink. There are tall varieties as well as compact plants that will work well in containers. I planted red Pentas in a west sided flowerbed last year and they were covered in blossoms that attracted clouds of butterflies. Red Pentas are a good midsummer substitute for the traditional geranium, which usually does not like our hot afternoon sun. The Butterfly Deep Pink Penta was selected as a Texas Superstar, and is a proven performer all over the state. Pentas will tolerate heat and require very little maintenance. Plant in well-drained garden soil, and apply water-soluble fertilizer every few weeks to encourage continual blooming.

Celosia or cockscomb blooms in vibrant shades of red, yellow, pink, and orange with flowers that either look like a rooster comb or a plume. When many other plants have succumbed to the summer heat and drought, celosia will thrive and blossom. Celosia flowers dry easily and maintain their color for winter bouquets. They reseed easily in the flower garden. Two new varieties, *Celosia plumosa* “Fresh Look Red” and “Fresh Look Yellow” have been selected All America winners for 2004 because they will thrive in heat, drought and rainy conditions with minimal disease. Both will be about 18

inches tall and spread 19-20 inches. The All-America Selection website states, “ ‘Fresh Look Yellow’ is perfect for busy gardeners who want summer-long flower color on carefree plants.” Many varieties of celosia are available in local stores.

Gomphrena or Bachelor’s Buttons have been a favorite of Texas gardeners for years. The clover-like blooms come in shades of purple, pink, red, lavender and white and cover the mound shaped plants, which grow about two feet tall and wide. They grow easily from seed, thrive in the heat, have few pests and also dry easily for everlasting bouquets. Gomphrena can be started from seed in the garden now until July. Local nurseries also have Gomphrena plants available. Dwarf varieties are available, but they are more susceptible to root rot than the taller varieties.

These are only a few of the flowers we have available for our home gardens. Next week I’ll discuss other choices for summertime color.