

Texas Superstars™

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Heavy rains continued in Angelina County this week, making yard work impossible. Gardeners are optimists by nature and are planning summer gardens for the better weather sure to come. Finding quality plants that survive this wet weather, and other severe conditions has been a major reason for the Texas Superstar™ program.

A Texas Superstar™ is a plant that has been tested for several years in field trials across the state, receiving minimal soil preparation, minimal water and no pesticides. Only the best-looking and most reliable plants are selected to be “Texas Superstars™”. “Beautiful, tough and Texan” is how the glossy brochure describes landscape plants that are specifically adapted to our state.

Here are three Texas Superstars that Jerry Parsons, PhD, a professor and extension horticultural specialist with Texas A & M University System has introduced. For more information visit the website, www.texassuperstar.com to see pictures and descriptions of all the Texas Superstars™.

‘Katie Dwarf Ruellia’ or Dwarf Mexican Petunia is sure to thrive in your yard. The Texas Superstar website describes it as a “Spectacular, low-growing, heat tolerant perennial with profusions of violet, light pink or white flowers. Highly pest resistant. Quickly fills in as a ground cover. Plant in full sun or partial shade. Plants are 1 foot wide by 1 foot tall, and spreads by self-seeding.” Dwarf Mexican Petunias are a good choice for those “hard to grow” areas of your yard. I once planted Dwarf Mexican Petunias in a flower bed with rich garden soil. It seemed a bit invasive so I moved them to an area where I needed ground cover. The plants will die back in winter, and quickly grow back

in the spring, and then reward you with blooms until frost. On hot afternoons you can hear the seeds popping as they are expelled several feet from the plant.

'Belinda's Dream' Rose was the first rose to be named a Texas Superstar. It is a shrub rose and "has large, fragrant and very double pink blossoms. Successive flushes of bloom spring to frost. So disease tolerant that fungicide sprays seldom required. A near perfect landscape rose." is how the Texas Superstars website describes it. Plant in full sun and it will grow four feet tall and three feet wide. I am saving a spot for 'Belinda's Dream' in the garden I'm planning outside our master bedroom window.

Firebush is an evergreen shrub that is very heat and drought tolerant and covered with red tubular blossoms from June to November. The foliage turns bright red in the fall, and it can be planted in almost any well-drained soil, even heavy clays. I planted a firebush in a large pot last summer and we enjoyed both the blossoms and the hummingbirds it attracted until late fall. This year I will plant firebush in a bed in a hot dry area near our driveway, surrounded by lantana.

Dr. Parsons will be one of four speakers at the "Greater East Texas Gardening Extravaganza" hosted by the Angelina County Extension office and the Angelina County Master Gardeners on Saturday April 2, at the Pitser Garrison Civic Center. Parsons will present "Texas Superstars™", many of which he has developed. His zany brand of humor will be sure to entertain those who attend this lecture.

Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. and the day concludes 3:30 pm. For more information and to download a registration form, visit the Angelina County Master Gardeners website, www.go-lufkin.com/mastergardeners. Mark your calendar and register today for the "Greater East Texas Gardening Extravaganza". See you there!

