



Lantanas

by Michelle Le Strange, UCCE Master Gardener Advisor, Emeritus

Lantanas thrive in the full sun and heat of our summers in the valley. Their roots prefer warm soils and light watering, which is uncharacteristic of so many plants. When planting lantanas for the first time in the garden, it is best to wait until late spring. They will grow rapidly all summer and fall, and then usually die back to woody stems with the first frost in winter. But don't despair, most will survive even a sudden frost and resume their growth in spring.

Members of the Verbena family, many lantanas are native to tropical areas in North, Central, and South America. They have dark green simple leaves often with toothed edges and born in opposite pairs along a stem. The crushed foliage has a pungent odor that some people find objectionable, but it is also easy to grow accustomed to. If grown in dense shade the foliage can get mildew, but this is rarely a problem here. Lantana flowers are attractive to butterflies, moths, and birds. However, blackberry-like fruit are toxic.



Container grown lantana

Another reason why we like lantanas is the profusion of color they provide throughout the entire growing season. They produce tiny flowers in tight clusters that look like miniature nosegays. Both "old fashioned" and newer hybrid lantanas come in vibrant multi-colors, which are perfect for summer pizzazz in the landscape. Several varieties are available as one solid color. Most nurseries carry several different cultivars.

The first big decision you need to make is which growth habit best fits your garden design or patio planter. Lantanas grow in four forms: large, loose and informal shrub; round mound and more formal shrub habit; low, spreading, groundcover; and a dwarf compact habit. Shrubby kinds are used as low hedges or foundation plants. Spreading kinds are excellent groundcovers that are effective spilling over raised beds, planter boxes or hanging baskets.

After you determine which growth habit best suits the location where you want to plant, all you need to do is select which color best fits your landscape decorating theme. The multi-color, "confetti" like colors instantly create a festive mood in your garden or patio decor.

Lantana montevidensis is known as the trailing lantana. *Lantana camara* is the taller shrub. In today's market we buy hybrids or selections of the two species. Here are a few that are commonly seen.

Groundcovers:

'Confetti' blossoms are a mix of yellow, pink and purple.

'Cream Carpet' blossoms are cream with a bright yellow throat.

'Gold Rush' blossom are a rich golden yellow.

'Spreading Sunset' blossoms are vivid yellow-orange red.



Photo courtesy of Forest Starr & Kim Starr
Biologists / Environmental Consultants

Shrubs:

'American Red' blossoms are bright red with yellow; 4-6 feet tall and wide.

'Radiation' blossoms are rich orange-red; 3-5 feet tall and wide.

'Irene' blossoms are magenta and lemon yellow; compact 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide.

'Dwarf yellow' blossoms are yellow; 2-4 feet tall and wide

The "Patriot" Series offers a variety of lantanas in heights (tallest to shortest) that they market as pillars, classics, ponies, petites, and weepers.

After planting, watch the butterflies come to visit the flowers. Only an occasional snip here and there is needed to keep plants in check all season long!

June 2017, 2017