



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## A Trio of Summer Favorites (June 15, 2019)

by Susan Franciskovich, UCCE Master Gardener

Whether you are a novice or an advanced gardener, or anything in-between, we Master Gardeners try as a part of our mission to encourage all of you to get outside, do some gardening and connect with nature. Furthermore, UCCE Master Gardeners are trained to teach best practices, based on current UC research. With that in mind, I will share information with you about three summer garden favorites which might appeal to you: Cuphea, Matilija poppy and Mexican marigold.

**Cupheas** (KOO-fe-a) are popular for their colorful flowers which bloom all summer. Most species begin blooming almost as soon as they emerge from winter dormancy. Cuphea is a family of plants which contains about 115 species. They are valued not only for their small colorful and attractive flowers, but also for the butterflies, hummingbirds, and nectar-feeding insects which they attract. Cupheas, natives of Mexico and Central America, are woody subshrubs. Cupheas work well in small beds, in borders, along paths and in containers. For container growing, try this simple and pretty grouping: in a large size pot, plant a combination of lime green ornamental sweet potato vine (*Ipomoea batatas*), along with any colorful variety of *Calibrachoa* (million bells) and cuphea. (All of these plants and others mentioned in this article are available in local nurseries.)

The following are popular species of Cuphea, along with their common names: *Cuphea hyssopifolia* ("Mexican Heather", pink, purple or white); *Cuphea ignea* ("Cigar Plant", bright red) and *Cuphea llavea* ("Bat Face", red, purple and black"). I have just planted a new *Cuphea ignea* hybrid, ("Vermillionaire"). It promises to bear lots of scarlet orange flowers over the summer. Already this spring, I have noticed hummingbirds in my garden, darting back and forth between the cupheas and their neighbor, purple Amistad sage.

Cupheas can be a great addition to low-maintenance, carefree gardens because they are rarely bothered by pest or disease if planted in well-drained garden soil, in full to part sun. Whichever species you might try, sit back and enjoy the summer-long display of hummingbirds, butterflies and nectaring insects.



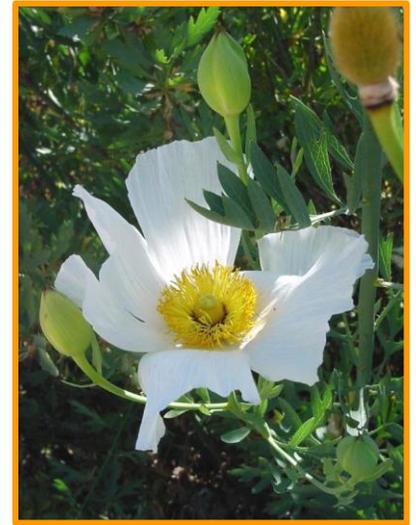
*Cuphea ignea* – Cigar Plant  
Texas A & M AgriLife Extension

As for the second of my favorites, it's fair to say that the glory of springtime in my backyard is when the **Matilija poppy** (*Romneya coulteri*) blooms, lasting into early summer. Matilija (muh-TIL-uh-ha) poppy is native to the coastal mountains and valleys of Southern California and Baja California.

History records that the Matilija poppy was a candidate for state flower but was beat out by the California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) in 1903. Today we would call that "Poppy Wars".

The Matilija is a 6-8 foot shrubby perennial plant, bearing 9 inch white crepe-papery petaled blossoms, centered with a cluster of golden stamens. It is said to have the largest flowers of any California native plant, is truly spectacular looking and is sometimes called "The Fried Egg Plant."

The Matilija poppy has irregularly lobed gray-green leaves, thick stems and spreads by rhizomes. It is a very robust plant and likes lots of growing room in full sun with very little water, tolerating many types of soils. It can be invasive if side shoots are not removed. In fall, Matilija is cut back nearly to the ground. Although easy to grow once established, propagation is difficult from seeds, so look for a plant in your local nursery. The roots are very sensitive, so be sure to handle them carefully when transplanting. There are two varieties of Matilija: "White Cloud" (described earlier) with profuse very large blossoms and "Butterfly" which is a many branched shrub with smaller flowers that are slightly rounded.



The last of my trio of favorites is **Mexican marigold** (*Tagetes lemmonii*), an attractive high desert perennial shrub. This plant is native to southern Arizona and into northern Mexico. This vigorous upright and open plant lightens and brightens my garden. Attracting butterflies while repelling disease and insects, the Mexican marigold is a perfect addition to a cottage-type garden.

Mexican marigold has lacy green foliage and forms a round herby shrub, growing to about 4 feet tall and six feet wide. The leaves are strongly aromatic and release an appealing scent of lemon and mint. Golden yellow-orange daisy-like flowers bloom sporadically all year, peaking in winter and spring. Mexican marigold does well in sun or part-shade in well-drained soil with low to moderate watering. Once established, the plant can be drought tolerant.



Mexican marigold can be pruned back heavily after flowering during late spring and/or in the fall to stimulate growth and flowering. It is a disease and pest free plant.

Whatever your level of gardening experience, I hope you can relax and achieve some measure of gardening contentment. Keep in mind that crabby gardeners are few and far between. Also know that most gardeners learn by trial and error--and error and error. Thankfully, the ultimate teacher, Mother Nature, is very patient.

**The UCCE Master Gardeners will be available to answer your gardening questions at the following venues in June:**

Visalia Farmers' Market – Every Saturday morning (8-11 am), Visalia Sear's parking lot on Mooney  
Hanford "Thursday Night Marketplace" – every second Thursday (5:30 – 9:00 pm) through October  
Porterville Farmers' Market @ Sierra View Hospital – every Thursday (8-11:30 am) through June  
Masters Gardeners also maintain the Tulare County Courthouse Roses and the Ralph Moore Memorial Garden on the 3rd Wed. (8-10 am) of each month and are available for questions.

For answers to all your home gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 684-3325, Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30 am; or Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m.; or visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions:  
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